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HIS LAST WEEK

An Imaginary Narrative
of Thomas, the Doubter

BY THE REVEREND
J. W. G. WARD, D.D.

HIS LAST WEEK
TREASURE TROVE FOR LITTLE
PEOPLE

CAMEOS FROM CALVARY
THE MASTER AND THE TWELVE
PROBLEMS THAT PERPLEX
MESSAGES FROM MASTER MINDS
PARABLES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

HIS LAST WEEK

AN IMAGINARY NARRATIVE OF
THOMAS, THE DOUBTER

BY

J. W. G. WARD, D.D.

Minister of
First Congregational Church, Detroit, Mich.,
formerly of Tollington Park, London, Eng.
and Emmanuel Church, Montreal.



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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

THE records of the Evangelists sometimes make us wonder what impression Christ made on the other Apostles. Peter's recollections are embodied in Mark's version. Matthew and John, apart from questions of the *Logia* and the Fourth Gospel, were of the Apostolic company. Each of these writes from his own standpoint. It would be interesting, however, to know how the other eight, excluding Judas Iscariot, would tell the story of that marvellous Master with whom they were privileged to live.

One of the most alluring figures of the Twelve is Thomas, the doubter. His stout refusal at first to admit our Lord's resurrection must have been a sore trial to his fellow-disciples. We have tried, therefore, to view the momentous happenings of Christ's last week on earth through Thomas's eyes, and in an imaginary narrative have sought to explain his transition from crushing unbelief to the glorious certainty of a soul in contact with the eternal verities.

Where scholarship differs regarding the exact sequence of events in that week, we crave the indulgence of our readers if variations occur in this

narration of them. Our object is to present the facts in such a vivid way that a new realisation of the Risen Redeemer may be found. And in that faith which dispels doubt and awakens confidence born of conviction, the soul may acquire new courage and strength with which to face the perplexities of modern life.

J. W. G. WARD.

I

PROLOGUE

*"Let thy gold be cast in the furnace,
Thy red gold, precious and bright,
Do not fear the hungry fire,
With its caverns of burning light:
And thy gold shall return more precious,
Free from every spot and stain;
For gold must be tried by fire,
As a heart must be tried by pain!"*

*"In the cruel fire of Sorrow
Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail;
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
Do not let thy spirit quail:
But wait till the trial is over,
And take thy heart again;
For as gold is tried by fire,
So a heart must be tried by pain!"*

A. A. PROCTER.

PROLOGUE

MEN sometimes hurl the contumelious stone, and its sharp edges sorely wound. But the mud of slander, while not so deadly, yet sticks longer. That is why I am called Thomas, the Doubter. What is the reason? It is true that after Christ was crucified, doubts dark as the pit swept over my soul. I admit that I even declared that I could not believe that He had risen from the dead unless I saw the prints of the nails in His hands. But do those who, often without serious thought, call me doubter know why I was the prey of depression? They do not. Were they familiar with my story, they might understand. They know naught of the trials, many and fierce, which beset my early days, nor have they heard that the light of life itself was extinguished in my soul when Miriam died.

I had brought her from the northern uplands, where the winds blow fresh from Lebanon, and the sunlight plays through the sweet-scented woodlands. Never was bride so fair. But in the hot city where, perforce, I must earn my bread, she wilted like a fair blossom transplanted to uncongenial soil. So intent was I on the work of

the day, which was to bring added comfort and happiness to her, that I did not see that she was sickening for a sight of the land she loved. Bravely she bore the increasing burden of suffering. No word escaped her, save some kindly enquiry about my doings through the long hours between morn and evening. Then, at length, the awful truth suddenly flashed on my trade-filled mind. The roses had fled from her cheeks. That lovely face was distorted with agony as, with tightened lips, she strove to keep back the cry of pain. Yet neither the skill of the apothecary nor the love of my heart could keep afar the spectral hand of death. I beat my breast in fury at my blindness; I blamed myself for the devotion I had lavished on my work but which ought to have been given to her. And in impotence, I watched by her couch—ah, God! how she was tortured—and there was none to help! The weeks went by. Then the Angel of His presence swept noiselessly into my home, and taking the soul of my Miriam, pure as the snows of Lebanon, and fragrant as the incense of the Sanctuary, he soared to the Eternal Habitations.

Long months passed. Never robust, the long watching and anxiety, coupled with the inconsolable grief of an empty heart, told on me, and my health failed. I was a wreck. What was there to live for? Why had God, the merciful

and gracious, taken her, while hundreds about me were useless idlers on the earth? My Miriam—mine no more! I was bitter. Faith had fled. The springs of happiness were dried up. I was ready even to curse God and die when—He came!

The fame of Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee, was on the people's lips. They said He could rebuke the bitterest pangs that assailed the human frame, and quench the fires of fever by a word. Nay, more, by some strange power, the like of which man had never seen before, He could even recall the dead to life. Perchance my beloved might be given back to my arms if He would wield the power which were His! So I thought. Yet while my petition was scarcely framed, I heard Him speak such wondrous words of comfort, the light of love flashing meanwhile in His eyes, that my soul leapt up to meet His. Thus when He called me to become one of His disciples, how could one withstand love so compelling? Besides, I would then be the better able to press my claim to His compassionate help.

In the sacred fellowship which followed, light dawned upon my soul. Even sorrow might be as the fires of the crucible, purging the gold of its dross. And this I also learned from His lips: though my beloved could not return to me, I might rejoin her, knitting up the severed ties of

earth, and building again that fair fabric of our dreams shattered by death. But then came sorrow on sorrow! This divine Master, who had been acclaimed by one of our company, Simon Peter, as the Christ of God, was foully slain! That grim menace which had shadowed my life before now cast its dread gloom over His. And He, instead of conquering death, was mastered by it.

Now do you wonder at my unbelief? They told me He had risen. How could I believe when, with mine own eyes, I had seen Him die on the cross, had seen the wanton thrust of that Roman spear pierce His side, had seen Him laid in a stranger's tomb? Truly, I doubted; yet as truly came I to a stronger faith. It showed me the Master, verily the same, and yet so different, luminous as light itself and with the calm majesty of the Victor. And thus, that others may have a like faith, do I set forth the story of those dramatic days, culminating not on Calvary, but in the resplendent glory of the Resurrection.

That last week I can never forget. Some time prior to the close of His ministry, Christ had left Jerusalem, where we had met with growing opposition, and He had decided to sojourn awhile in the neighbourhood of Ephraim. This is a small town, about twenty miles to the north of the capi-

tal. What His object was in thus returning to the scene of that temptation which marked the outset of His mission was not apparent to us, unless it were that He sought again to confirm those convictions which had moved Him ever to take the path of self-sacrifice. Here, however, we remained until the approaching Feast of the Passover summoned us towards Jerusalem. But for some purpose which He did not divulge, instead of going directly to our destination the Master chose the way which lay to the south-east. A walk of twelve miles brought us to Jericho. For the third time, He had spoken of the suffering that awaited Him. And now, as I look back, I am astonished how we failed to grasp His meaning. It must have been that we were still thinking of the kingdom on which we had set our hearts. As we were about to enter Jericho, the most pitiful cries imaginable rent the air.

“Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me. . . . Have mercy upon me.”

It was a poor, blind mendicant. His name was Bartimaeus. Vainly the bystanders urged the man to keep silence. The more they remonstrated with him, the louder grew his supplications. Jesus stopped, and when we had brought the man to Him, He asked, “What wilt thou that I should unto thee?”

It was pathetic to see the mingled hope and anguish on that face as he replied, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

Many times had we seen similar cases. The boon was granted, and to the amazement of the people who came crowding round, no less than of Bartimaeus himself, his eyes were opened. There was, however, little time to be lost if we were to find quarters in Jericho for the night. The Sabbath drew on, yet though this miracle had been wrought before the eyes of the town-dwellers, none was gracious enough to offer the Master the shelter of his house. That may have been because the hatred of the rulers was well known, and the people were, therefore, afraid to show any favour to Him. But we were strangely provided for. Perched high in a sycamore, was a man who, although I did not recall seeing him before, was evidently known to Jesus. Pausing beneath the tree, He said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house."

This fellow was a tax-gatherer, and from what we heard was in bad odour with the townsfolk. But that was the beginning of better days for him. We had scarcely seated ourselves at his table when he surprised every one by a spontaneous promise of restitution to those he had defrauded.

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

The look of pleasure which lit up Christ's countenance showed the effect of those words. Indeed, their influence was felt right through the evening. In happy converse the hours passed, yet none of us realised that that was the last Sabbath we were to spend with our Master on earth.

At the conclusion of the Sabbath, we set out in the evening for Bethany, where Lazarus and his sisters lived. There were hundreds like ourselves who were making for Jerusalem for the Passover, but accommodation within the city itself was at a premium. Only the wealthy could afford the exorbitant prices charged. It was "the season." Pilgrims were relatively few at other times, and so those who catered for them naturally sought to make the most of their opportunity. But for Passover purposes, the surrounding villages were reckoned technically to be within the city's boundaries, and so the humbler classes who could not lodge within the sacred walls, availed themselves of quarters as modest as their means. The way was toilsome enough travelling along those ill-fashioned roads, but there was also the added discomfort of these jostling crowds, hilarious and somewhat noisy. They appeared to me to be

more excited by the thought of a holiday in the capital than by the religious significance of the occasion. Yet when we reached our destination, the quiet pervading that little home seemed but the more grateful after our tiresome journey. The gracious welcome of Martha, the glow of pleasure on Mary's cheeks, proved how much the Master meant to that humble abode. And though I knew our coming would tax its hospitality to the full, there was no trace of aught but undiluted pleasure in the faces of the two.

We found, however, that a feast had been arranged in Christ's honour by another recipient of His bounty. This was Simon, the Leper. And it was there that Mary anointed the feet of the Lord, and where also Judas Iscariot, that son of perdition, appeared in his true light. I am anticipating my story, but some of the brethren had long felt a growing aversion to him; not that there was anything tangible to which exception could be taken. It was the critical spirit he often displayed, and the churlishness that had marked him for some time. But when the fragrance of the spikenard filled the house, Judas said in a voice that every one could hear, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"

There was no ring of sincerity in the words. On the contrary, the snarl of the cynic could be

detected. We knew he cared nothing for the poor. Our opinion was that he had some scheme of his own which he was anxious to further. But Jesus turned a searching glance upon him and said, as He laid His hand reassuringly on Mary's head, "Let her alone. Against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always."

I linger over the memories of that evening. We returned to the dwelling of Lazarus. Happy knots of people were still passing to and fro. The sound of distant music and laughter could be heard from the clustering houses. But as we reached that hospitable door, Christ was at home. Only those who have been homeless can know what that means. He had often slept with only the dome of midnight for His roof. In summer days, that mattered little; but there were other times when, through the bitter hostility of men or because few cared, the Master and we were compelled to spend the night at the mercy of the elements. But here, all was so different. To be where love reigned and peace filled the heart, where all was harmony and happy fellowship, was akin to heaven itself. And did not those who gave us shelter feel the same thing? Christ, the beloved Friend to whom they owed not only their brother's life, but also many another blessing, graced their simple abode.

II

SUNDAY—A DAY OF TRIUMPH

*"He sat upon the ass's foal and rode
Toward Jerusalem. Beside Him walked,
Closely and silently, the faithful Twelve,
And on before Him went a multitude
Shouting hosannas, and with eager hands
Strewing their garments thickly in His way.*

*. . . There she stood,
Jerusalem, the city of His love,
Chosen from all the earth; Jerusalem
That knew Him not, and had rejected Him;
Jerusalem, for whom He came to die!
The shouts redoubled from a thousand lips
At the fair sight; the children leaped and sang
Louder hosannas; the clear air was filled
With odour from the trampled olive-leaves.*

*"He thought not of the death that He should die;
He thought not of the thorns He knew must pierce
His forehead; of the buffet on the cheek,
The scourge, the mocking homage, the foul scorn!*

*. . . He only saw
Jerusalem, the chosen, the loved, the lost!
He only felt that for her sake His life
Was vainly given, and in His pitying love
The sufferings that would clothe the heavens in black
Were quite forgotten. Was there ever love,
In earth or heaven, equal unto this?"*

N. P. WILLIS.

THE SUNDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF TRIUMPH

DAY broke with a splendour of amber and gold, flushed with rose. It was springtide. The air was soft and vernal, the soil moist with many showers. The vales of Judaea, kissed now by the morning sun, were arrayed in a gorgeous mantle embroidered with myriad flowers. But apart from all that, it was a day to be remembered. Long before dawn, Jesus had arisen and gone forth without disturbing His friends. The sure sense of an impending crisis was upon Him. The more need, therefore, to spend some time in undisturbed fellowship with the Father, as we had frequently known Him to do before.

It was still early when He returned. We were all astir, for we were almost as eager as children to complete the journey and tread once more the sacred streets of Jerusalem. There is a charm about an old historic city which possibly you also have felt. But did we anticipate something unusual on this visit, you ask? We certainly believed that the Master might take the opportunity afforded by the crowds of pilgrims, many of

whom were familiar with His work in various parts of the country, to claim the seat of power. The mysterious sayings which had fallen from His lips for several weeks past argued the possibility of some manifestation of His rights. And Jesus read our thoughts. We noticed that He was quieter than was His wont, as though some grave issue confronted Him. But then, we were, as I say, too much engrossed with the possible outcome of the day to give that more than passing comment.

Drawing near to Bethphage, Christ turned to two of our company and said, "Go your way into the village that is over against you, and straightway as ye enter into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon no man ever yet sat; loose him and bring him. And if any one say unto you, 'Why do ye this?' say ye, 'The Lord hath need of him'; and straightway he will send him back hither."

That was remarkable in itself. The Master had never sought service of this kind before. Had He not journeyed the whole way thus far on foot? What could be the meaning of this? We were discussing matters in an undertone when our fellow-disciples came back leading an ass, her colt trotting obediently by her side. The owner was evidently one of the many whose lives had been enriched by Christ's ministry, and without question he had lent his beast for the day.

But it was the colt Jesus chose, and as our cloaks were laid across its back, some dim memory of Zechariah's writings, learned long ago in the village school, came to mind. I think, perhaps, it was to Nathanael, that diligent student of the Scriptures, to whom Christ's purpose was first apparent.

"Dost thou not understand?" he whispered to Philip. "This is indeed the fulfilment of that ancient prophecy. Moreover, dost thou not recall what our Lord said unto me that day when thou didst lead me to His feet: 'Thou shalt see greater things than these. . . . Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'?"

"Yea, full well do I remember. And, verily, there seemeth to be much in what thou dost say. Let us tell the others."

Somewhat diffidently, Philip spoke to Peter who at that moment was ostentatiously arranging the flowing folds of the garments on which Jesus was to sit, and enquired what his opinion was.

"Enough! What other dost thou think it could mean?" In my opinion Peter had not thought of the prophetic aspect of this before, but his proud nature would seldom permit him to confess ignorance. "We know this to be the Messiah," he continued, "and ere this day closes, all Jerusalem shall know it likewise!"

Slowly the small cavalcade set off. The narrow way was congested with joyous crowds, more excited than ever as they drew nearer to the sturdy walls and tapering towers of the city. The moment was opportune. One of our company raised the cry, "Hosanna!" The effect was wonderful. Some of the pilgrims, as they pressed aside to make a path for Jesus, recognised Him as the Prophet of Galilee. They took up the jubilant strain. Then falling in behind us, they marched, a huge, motley column, increasing in size as it drew nigh to the gates. Such enthusiasm was infectious. Before this, the mood of the people had been the happy abandon of the holiday-maker. Now it became charged with religious fervour bordering on fanaticism. Overhanging branches of the palms were torn down and waved about. Some of the people, with excessive display of devotion, even stripped off their robes and rudely carpeted the way. It was a scene of unparalleled excitement, and a situation fraught with perilous possibilities. But apparently unmoved by such a popular ovation, Jesus rode quietly on, a figure of calm majesty.

Beneath the archway, on through the portals where the cobbled streets now widened out, the procession wended its way. None seemed to direct it, but on it moved past the bazaars where merchants and buyers forgot their haggling to

gaze open-mouthed at the sight. They were long accustomed to the noise and riotous merriment of Feast times, but they had never witnessed anything to equal this.

“Who is this?” The question was reiterated on every side.

“This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Jostled and thrust aside as of no importance like flotsam amid the rolling waves, were two of the Pharisees. They had been in conference with the High Priest, and leaving the Temple precincts had been gratified by the courteous bows accorded to them by early arrivals. But now the way in which they were ignored did more than ruffle their dignity; it angered them. Such words as these which the people were crying out were blasphemous! The Sanhedrin had already shown more than enough tolerance of the Nazarene! This matter must be brought to a head. So they made their way with all possible speed to Caiaphas. He had, however, already learned what was on foot, for as they waited to lay their information before him, one of the rulers was saying bitterly, “Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after Him.” Caiaphas shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. Then he instructed a group of his colleagues to proceed at once to Jesus, and order Him to dis-

perse His followers that such an unseemly demonstration might end. The two Pharisees accompanied the party on their errand. Through the cloisters, they passed into the Temple's Outer Court. The procession had halted. Jesus was just dismounting from the ass when they forced their way through the multitude and stood before Him.

"Master, rebuke Thy disciples." They had decided on this mode of address on seeing the dimensions of the crowd. It was just as well to use some diplomacy.

Jesus answered, "I tell you that, if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out!"

Abashed, they stood apart, wondering what should be their next step. They had not counted on this. The command of Caiaphas which they had just uttered ought to have awed this untutored Peasant into silence. Yet as they watched Him narrowly He showed no sign of fear. Would He persist in His disregard of priestly authority? The crowd had become strangely subdued at the coming of the Pharisees, and now stood wonderingly by. But the Master, deigning no further reply, left His critics marvelling at His calm self-confidence. And baffled, yet not defeated, they departed to make their report. For the moment, possibly He believed He had triumphed, they argued, but their time would

come. They were too subservient to the will of Caiaphas to pursue things further at that juncture, for they could see how Jesus had swayed the minds of the people. They were His to a man. The priests knew that. Any order He might give, any course suggested, would be followed implicitly. A violent uprising against the priestly régime might take place, and then Rome's mailed fist would fall on both parties without discrimination.

The rulers had no sooner gone, however, when Jesus quietly urged the people to go their ways. He had no wish to provoke the anger of the Sanhedrin, nor to fan the flames of incipient revolt. But, I suppose, disappointment, even chagrin, was written large upon our faces. What! allow such a chance to pass without further effort? It seemed preposterous! The Master had but to speak the word and the priestly hierarchy would be thrust out for ever from its unholy domination. Yea, from Herod's fingers the sceptre might be plucked and he, the shameful profligate, the murderer of the heroic Baptist, be toppled from his throne. Could even Pilate's men withstand the concerted effort of the people, headed by Jesus and aided by His doughty disciples? It was the hour for which with often ill-restrained impatience, we had long waited! Simon, the Zealot, was fuming with indignation at such a

wasted opportunity. Judas spat on the ground contemptuously as though long convinced that such a lack of practical self-assertion were to be expected of One so unworldly. Yet none of us dare question Him. Peter might have done so, but the rebuke which was once addressed to him "Get thee behind Me, Satan"—still stung his soul. The sons of Zebedee might, but they too recalled His outraged love when they had sought the chief places in His kingdom. Yet though unspoken, deep were the problems which filled our hearts.

Why had the Lord purposely assumed the mantle of the Messiah only to cast it aside? It seemed utterly alien to His nature to seek notoriety or to take a line which must almost certainly evoke a popular demonstration. Yet on reflection the reasons became self-evident. He had spent nearly three years in ministering to men. His fame had travelled from Dan to Beersheba. As a preacher, He had revealed God as a Father of infinite love and mercy. Those divine qualities had been demonstrated in all His own service for men. Had He succeeded in convincing them that He was indeed the Messiah for whom they longed? Far from it. Although He used the language of the people, He yet spake as never man had spoken before. Although He disclosed the will of God in matchless allegory and glowing parable, was His meaning always

grasped? Prejudice was ever at work. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" asked some, with crushing superiority. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" demanded others, with equal disdain.

Even the axiom that "Actions speak louder than words" did not always apply in Christ's case. He opened the eyes of the blind, but the mind dwelt in spiritual darkness. He gave strength to the impotent and cleansing to the leprous, but moral strength was spurned and the heart remained corrupt. He brought life to the dead, but many a soul remained cold and unresponsive to His divine touch. Again disparagement and unbelief. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."

Christ's supreme aim was to bring men to God, and to prove to them that God had thus come to men was the sure way to secure that end. If His words had been misinterpreted, His works misconstrued, at least, so we reasoned, His entry into Jerusalem could not fail to be understood. Here, dramatically portrayed, was the fulfilment of that prophecy with which the nation was familiar. The method of it was in itself suggestive. The Messiah came, stooping to conquer by love, not by force. Whatever ground for question or doubt there had been before was now gone. The Messiah had been made manifest.

That being done Christ seemed to have no further object to secure. He certainly did not wish to stir the passions of the people; to bring them into conflict with either the religious or civic authorities was the last thing He desired. And now that the excitement had died down, the Master mingling with the crowd was no longer a possible storm-centre. But the sensation caused by His coming set eddying circles moving that reached far out and touched other lives. Among the pilgrims who had journeyed from afar to celebrate the Feast were some of Greek origin. It has been said that these men were messengers from Abgarus, king of Edessa, who, having heard of the wonderful powers possessed by the Galilaean, and the scant recognition given to Him by His own nation, together with the plots framed against His life, offered Him a place of security in that distant realm.

More probably, in my judgment, these Greeks were proselytes; that would explain their presence in the Holy City at that time, but not the reason for their request to be personally presented to Jesus. The truth was, He had stirred their hearts as none other had ever done. Though these men sprang from the nation which gave birth to Socrates and Plato, to Sophocles and Demosthenes, there was a depth of wisdom, a power to reach the soul and sway the emotions,

which neither philosophy, literature, nor oratory could wield. Hence the request. It was addressed first to Philip. He bore a Greek name and that may have prompted these strangers to appeal to him as the most likely mode of approach. Jesus was, I remember, occupied at the moment, and so Philip, who was always inclined to excessive caution, referred the matter to Andrew for his opinion. These pilgrims were, however, neither in league with the rulers as Philip seemed to think, nor had they any ulterior motive in thus seeking an interview. So they were brought to Christ. We saw that divine face illumined with the glow of deepest satisfaction. We listened, awed by the sublimity of our Master's words. "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. . . . Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." And it has been revealed to me since that just as those of the eastern world travelled far to bow at His manger-crib, so these from the west met Him almost within the shadow of His cross.

The day had been momentous indeed. We had passed from glad hopefulness to painful disillusionment, and although that conversation with the Greeks had raised our spirits temporarily, we had reached that point when we could no longer

ask what the results of that hour would be. The sun was beginning to decline as Jesus signified that He was ready to leave the city. We followed, some glad to get away from the scene of such bitter disappointment, the rest uncaring now what might happen. The truth is, surfeited with the events of the day, we had lost heart.

As we climbed the slopes of Olivet, Jesus paused to look back. The scene needs the genius of an artist rightly to describe it. Like a fairy spectacle, the Holy City lay peacefully beneath the afterglow of the setting sun. The tiny houses seemed to be nestling down for the night within the shelter of the walls. Familiar buildings could still be picked out, while surmounting the whole was the Temple, its walls still burnished by the tints of the sky. What moving memories centred in that sacred spot! The Master looked out from Olivet towards the city. There was a wistfulness in His eyes that haunts my heart to this day, for He saw the past, the present, and the future. What a story would those hills tell could they but speak! The tides of battle had swept about them like boisterous waves against a rock-strewn coast. David, the daring hero of Israel, had established his throne there, making Mount Zion his seat of power. Solomon, the splendid, had carried his father's schemes to completion, translating David's dreams into deeds. The royal

palace, the imposing towers and fortifications, were surpassed, however, by the House of God. The finest materials procurable had been fashioned by skilled craftsmen from afar. The project had laid hold of the popular imagination to a surprising extent. And when at last, after years of arduous toil, the work was finished, the Temple was consecrated to God amid a blaze of glory that almost overwhelmed the mind by its magnificence. Then troubles came with the passing years. The city was besieged, the Temple ravaged and stripped by Nebuchadnezzar, and its rubble-strewn courts resounded with the desolate howl of jackals. Rebuilt by Zerubbabel, later desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes and reconsecrated by Judas Maccabaeus, yet like some grim warrior, its turbulent history was written in the scars deep graven on its frame. Then Herod the Great, an Edomite time-server, had razed it to the ground, and rebuilt it both as a salve to his conscience and a means of securing the support of Jewish patriotism for his throne.

There it stood, the visible symbol of Judah's invisible God, and about it the peaceful homes of the city. Why then the look of inexpressible anguish in the Saviour's face? He saw what none other could see. The supersensitive soul has means of discerning the truth which others miss.

We turn aside from the Apostle's narrative to remark that to Francis Thompson, the poet who suffered and starved in London, the streets he traversed were full of human tragedy. "I see," he says, "a region whose hedgerows have set to brick, whose soil is chilled to stone; where flowers are sold and women; where the men wither and the stars; whose streets to me on the most glittering day are black. For I unveil their secret meanings. I read their human hieroglyphs. I diagnose from a hundred occult signs the disease which perturbs their populous pulses. Misery cries out to me from the kerb-stone, despair passes me by in the ways; I discern limbs laden with fetters impalpable, but not imponderable; I hear the shaking of invisible lashes, I see men dabbled with their own oozing life. This contrast rises before me; and I ask myself whether Ahriman be the stronger of the twain. From the claws of the sphinx my eyes have risen to her countenance which no eyes read." Carlyle has also a moving passage in *Sartor Resartus* which is remarkable for its powers of perception. His hero is looking out over the sleeping city, and speaks of "That stifled hum of midnight, when traffic has lain down to rest; and the chariot-wheels of vanity, still rolling here and there through distant streets, are bearing her to halls roofed in, and lighted to the due pitch of her;

and only vice and misery to prowl or to moan like night birds, are abroad: the hum, I say, like the stertorous, unquiet slumber of sick life, is heard in heaven! Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a fermenting vat lies simmering and hid! The joyful and the sorrowful are there, men are dying there, men are being born; men are praying—and around them all is the vast, void night.” How much more, then, would the Son of God feel Jerusalem’s need?

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The Apostle resumes.

Christ had spoken divine counsel and comfort to Jerusalem’s stricken soul; she had turned a deaf ear to His entreaties. He had sought to lead her into paths of peace; she had kept wilfully to ways of her own choosing. He had come, as the prophetic mind had mirrored, in the lowly guise of God’s Messiah; she had opened her gates to Him, but her heart remained shut. Greed and corruption embodied in the priestly caste, hypocrisy and cunning, poisoned the springs of life. And in that solemn evening hour we saw Him, with hands outstretched towards the uncaring capital, and in anguished tones we heard Him cry, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.”

There was a broken heart behind the words. For the time being He was helpless. Would that He might save her from herself! The dark pall of night creeping down from the surrounding hills was symbolic of the sorrows yet to be hers. For Christ saw the ruin and desolation which guilt incurs. In tenderest tones, we heard Him say, "The days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee. And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." And reluctantly, as though love still desired to find the smallest chance of serving the object of its affection, yet baffled by human perversity, Jesus turned away.

The night was warm and Bethany was still some distance away. We suggested that we might as well remain there beneath the olive trees. And seeing how wearied we were, He consented. It was not that He feared to return to the house of Lazarus, though there was a possibility that His enemies might seek Him there. It was rather that His heart desired privacy. Human like ourselves, the strain of the day's experiences was upon Him. He had tasted the sweet draught of victory and the bitterness of

spurned affection. He had given His best to the seeking hearts that had thronged about Him in the Temple courts. He had also seen His gifts trampled in the mire by others like pearls beneath the feet of swine. And as the night enfolded Him, bringing to a close the happenings of that eventful day, we could not but ask ourselves whether we too had not sometimes failed to discern the Highest.

III

MONDAY—A DAY OF CONQUEST,

*"God give us men. The time demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and willing
hands;
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honour; men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flatteries without shrinking;
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty and in private thinking."*

J. G. HOLLAND.

THE MONDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF CONQUEST

“**P**ERCHANCE this day our Master will show His kingly power and the victory shall be won!”

Such was the thought filling our minds as we laved our faces at the rivulet which gurgled down the slopes of Olivet. I noticed that Peter tightened his girdle as though he foresaw strenuous conflict ahead.

“We shall doubtless behold many strange things before yonder sun sets,” he remarked to Andrew, “though, in my judgment, the Lord should have shown more resolution while the people were ours.”

His brother looked at him in surprise. “Thou dost not yet trust His wisdom, then? Have we not often seen before that His ways are better than ours? To act precipitately were perchance to lose everything that might be gained with a little patience.”

“Thou dost not understand,” came the reply. “It is not rashness I counsel. Thou knowest that I am ever a man of circumspect ways, but I fear that delay may prove disastrous.”

Andrew smiled broadly at such views coming from his hot-headed brother, but any comment he was about to make was cut short as Peter continued:

"It is not that I do not trust the Master's judgment. It is rather that I am suspicious of Caiaphas and his godless crowd. Little dost thou suspect the lengths to which they may go. Didst thou not see the sneering hate on the faces of those he sent to us yesterday? But then, how couldest thou? Full well do I know the ways of the world. I have not marketed our fish all these years without learning the guile of those who are set on seeking their own ends!"

Peter was about to launch forth into a description of the various types with which he had been thrown into contact when, seeing that Jesus had already commenced the descent, he hastened to his usual place in the forefront of the company. We were not disposed to talk as we trailed down the narrow path. We were hungry after our bivouac beneath the trees, and there was little hope of breaking our fast until we reached the distant city. Early morning is proverbially a testing-time for temper, and ours were not of the best. Some of my companions were morose; they had been musing on the previous day's events. Others were doubtless moody thinking of the hot tiresome hours to be spent amid congested streets,

so different from the cool waters of Galilee to which they were accustomed. Only Jesus seemed in tune with the sweet influences of that spring morning. As the way widened out, we moved more closely to one another. But conversation was still at a low ebb. Suddenly our Lord stopped. He looked up at a fig tree standing by the roadside. Something might be found on it which might temporarily stay the pangs of hunger. For even though issues of the gravest moment confronted Him in the adjacent capital, He could not be unmindful of the physical necessities of His friends.

Mark's subsequent observation that "the time of figs was not yet" has been sadly misunderstood. While the usual season for figs was still some weeks off, the late autumn figs often remained on an isolated tree like this all through the winter. But here the luxuriant foliage also gave promise of the new fruit, for it is a peculiarity of the fig tree that the fruit forms before the leaves unfold. There was thus ample reason to expect fruit, but although there were signs of abundant life, we were sadly disappointed. Yet our Lord afterwards took advantage of such a remarkable phenomenon, and turned that barren tree to account. If there were no fruit to appease for a time our cravings, at least it should yield something of worth. As the

company proceeded on its way, He showed that a religious faith which had no vital experience of God, which stressed the importance of external appearances, might give indication of fruit-bearing, but in reality no fruit was possible. It was already dead at heart.

After arriving in the city, we broke our fast, and then prepared to face the work of the day. Christ was not more intent than we to seize the opportunity of meeting the multitudes now thronging the streets leading to the Temple, and surging about the Court of the Gentiles. A new confidence in His strategy mastered us.

"Why, truly," we whispered to one another, "now we understand why He did not pursue His triumph of yesterday at the time. He would let the impression made by His Messianic entry possess the minds of those who beheld it. Then, even as the leaven of which He once told us, the news will have been able to work all through the night. The entire city, yea, the whole countryside, will know now that He is verily in the midst. Thus success shall be assured."

Following the Master as He led the way to the Temple, our opinions were confirmed. The previous evening, He had avoided contact with the pilgrims. Now, like a swimmer to whom the summer seas make their appeal, He plunged boldly into the seething mass of humanity. We

noted the recognition in many faces, and looked delightedly on as He paused to greet this one and that whom He had met on His travels, or as He laid His hand caressingly on some tousled little head. This was just as it should be! Ah, the Lord was indeed wiser than we had given Him credit for! People were beginning to press after Him as He patiently forced a way through the crowd, and hope beat high again in our breasts. But where was He going? What did He intend to do?

We gathered around Him as He stopped for a moment, surveying the scene. The Outer Court was filled with newcomers, and ranged along one side were the traders who carried on their occupations not only under the shadow of the sacred fane, but also by licence of Annas.

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The scene so graphically pictured by the Apostle reminds us of a discovery Ruskin made in Venice. The church of San Giacomo di Rialto, dating from the fifth century, and standing near the Rialto bridge, had often stirred his admiration. One day, he noticed a stone built into the northern gable and bearing a Latin inscription. This gable faces the bridge which at one time was the place where the merchants met to transact business. He deciphered the wording carved on the stone. It read: "Hoc circa templum sit jus

mercantibus aequum, pondera nec vergant, nec sit conventio prave.”—“Around this temple let the merchants’ law be just, let not their weights be false, nor their covenants unfaithful.”

There was no such injunction before the minds of these mercenary exploiters of the people, although the place in which they stood ought to have kept them honest, even if no higher principle operated. They had a monopoly of the business. Lambs for the paschal offering and for purification, doves prescribed as the gift required from the extremely poor, bullocks for the thanksgiving sacrifice, amulets and souvenirs, were obtainable there—and nowhere else. Annas and his sons saw to that. Moreover, since only Hebrew currency was accepted in making these purchases as well as in paying the Temple dues, another means of revenue, and a very lucrative one, was discovered. Many Jews who came from remote places for the Passover had, as can be understood, money only of their adopted countries. This was regarded as useless until it had been changed. So, for a consideration—though with little consideration for their customers, be it said—the money-changers, seated with their small tables before them, plied their trade. In this quarter, disputes ending in angry words if not in blows were of frequent occurrence. The rates of exchange, the discount extorted, the in-

clusion of counterfeit coins, and even the giving of wrong change to the unsophisticated, all helped to swell the profits which, owing to the exorbitant premiums the bankers had to pay Annas for the concession, might otherwise have been small enough.

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But to let Thomas continue:

Christ stood looking at the appalling spectacle. The lowing of cattle and bleating of lambs, the hubbub of the crowd, the strident voices of the merchants soliciting patronage, the cries of mendicants,—blind and lame,—begging alms, made the precincts of the Temple like a market-place. But there was something worse than that! As the Master drew nearer, although His soul revolted from such detestable trafficking, He joined a group wrangling with one of the bankers. He could not but hear what was going on.

“Son of a dog! Dost thou dare question mine honesty? First thou art not content to pay a reasonable sum to have thy filthy money changed for lawful coin, and now thou sayest I have not given thee thy full due. Go to! By the beard of my father it is intolerable that one whom the High Priest doth honour with his favour should be called a rogue by an unwashed peasant. Get thee gone!”

“Yea, verily I will go,” the other replied, “but

not until I have that which is right, even though I take it with violent hands."

He was about to spring at the money-changer's throat when a strong hand gripped his shoulder. It was one of the Temple guards who was in the pay of the priests to keep an eye on possible disturbers. The man subsided for a moment, then turning to Jesus he cried, vehemently:

"It has surely come to something when one who would obey the law of Jehovah and would worship here as did his fathers, should be robbed and his earnings filched even within the courts of the Lord's House. What thinkest Thou? See, count it for Thyself. Didst Thou hear what yonder thief said?"

Without a word the Master walked away as though unwilling to be embroiled in the quarrel. The pilgrim looked at Him with unveiled surprise, mingled with disgust. "Methought the Galilaean would have had something to say to them. Doubtless, He too fears the anger of the High Priest, but, by the God of my fathers, unless . . ."

Jesus had not listened to the disparaging criticism uttered by this angry fellow. He was intent on some plan of His own. Making His way to the side of the forecourt, where bales and crates had been unpacked, and where the litter still lay upon the ground, He snatched up some loose frag-

ments of cord and swiftly knotted them into a scourge. It was of small use as a weapon, but sufficient for His purpose. Before we divined what He intended to do, He strode back to the line of traders. Seizing the tables with their bowls of coins of various denominations, He overturned them. As rapacious fingers reached after the rolling money now scattering between the feet of the bystanders, the scourge came into action across the stooping shoulders. One after another the low tables went over. Stepping aside for a moment, He flung back the barriers which enclosed the sheep and oxen, opened the crates of the imprisoned birds, and then turned on the cattle vendors and sellers of doves. He drove them forth, crying, "Is it not written, 'My House shall be called of all nations the house of prayer'? But ye have made it a den of thieves."

The Temple guards seemed to be at that moment conveniently absent. The reason I do not know unless they who had their own quarrel with those rascally merchants who were often reluctant to settle demands for what was regarded as "hush money," were not disposed to intervene. On the other hand, the traders not only felt the force of the Master's indictment, but also saw the savagely exultant faces of their victims ready with the slightest encouragement to join in the attack. There was only one thing to do. It was

not their quarrel. They had paid and paid handsomely for the privilege of doing business in the Temple Courts, so they determined to lodge their complaint with the authorities. Meanwhile, the embers of popular admiration were fanned into new flames. On all sides, approving cries broke out.

"Well done, Master. The time is ripe for judgment on those who defraud the poor and defile the House of Jehovah. Full oft have we sought redress from Caiaphas, but his cowardly hirelings have done nought for us. Thou hast taught them a lesson this day they will not forget!"

Not forget! Verily that was well said! I learned later how Annas sat in his private apartment adjacent to the house of the High Priest. He had been deposed from office long before by Rome's firm hand, because the authorities mistrusted him and not without good cause. He had indeed sought to undermine their power and circumvent every edict of the governor. Each of his sons had in turn also occupied the sacred position, though all had eventually been forced therefrom by Rome. But if the Procurator thought he could curb the ambitions and the unscrupulous rule of Annas simply by wresting the reins from his hands, it proved that he knew nothing of his antagonist. The ex-High Priest was too astute.

By secret diplomacy, he secured the election of Caiaphas. The latter had married Annas's daughter; he had also sold his soul to the unprincipled patriarch. Caiaphas might stand forth in all the splendour of his robes of office, he might be acknowledged as God's vicegerent, but Annas was still the power behind the throne. Every ordinance enforced on the people emanated from his scheming brain. And not content with authority alone, he exploited the very worship of Jehovah whom he had once sworn to honour. As was commonly known, he and his family controlled all the business transacted within the confines of the Temple. He spun the web by which the unwary were ensnared, yet all the time he kept discreetly in the background.

An attendant entered. Speaking in little more than a whisper as though schooled to secrecy, he communicated something which had an instantaneous effect upon the old man. His eyes flashed for an instant with an ominous light. Then the wizened face darkened into a scowl, and biting his lips, Annas smote the table before him with clenched fist.

"It cannot be! Send them in," he fumed, moved by ungovernable anger. That was only for a moment. He quickly recovered his composure, and when the deputation somewhat timidly and obsequiously stood before him, Annas

was apparently unperturbed. He knew all three men. They had long held his permission to do business with the annual pilgrims and provide any commodities of which they might stand in need, although negotiations had usually been carried on through his emissaries.

"And what may this matter be upon which ye require to disturb the meditations of God's servant? It is my hope that it is well based, for of a truth it is ill timed."

The ex-High Priest assumed an injured air, even as he pretended to know nothing of the errand on which they had come. He had his own reasons for appearing to remain impartial and to keep strictly within the circle of activity prescribed by Pilate. The latter had called him to book only too often.

"May it please my lord Annas," began the spokesman, moving uneasily from one foot to another, "it referreth to one, Jesus, a Galilaean. There is no need to tell thee who He is. My lord knoweth well all that concerneth the nation over which he hath for long extended his beneficent rule."

"Yea, I know of this—this Jesus. But hasten! There is little need of thy fulsome praise for humility becometh one such as I, dedicate to the service of Jehovah. Besides, my thoughts would

turn again to the holy things from which this intrusion hath withdrawn them.”

Feeling rebuked, though without detecting either the hypocrisy of the man or the interest which lay behind the half-closed eyes, the speaker narrated the events of the morning. He enlarged on the advantages which pilgrims enjoyed in being able to exchange their heathen money for the true coinage of the sanctuary, and also to purchase the necessary offerings for sacrifice. These were benefits which they could not obtain elsewhere—which was strictly true—and which were conferred by the Temple traders at a minimum cost—which was not quite true! But the privileges accorded to these public benefactors had been grossly interfered with by this self-constituted Reformer, and in thus assailing them, He had also impugned the honour of the Temple and those who directed its affairs. The speaker detailed the story of the attack which Jesus had made on them. The other members of the deputation, unable to restrain themselves any longer, were adding their own indignant protests when Annas raised his hand.

“This concerneth Caiaphas more than myself. Can ye not permit one who hath laid aside the cares of office that he may spend the years of his age in furthering the people’s good to enjoy the peace of life’s eventide?”

He watched with oblique eyes the effect of his words, knowing well these men would not penetrate his guise of piety.

"My lord doth speak wisely, but to us none can be supreme but thyself. Despite the edicts of the usurper, thou art venerated by this nation as the representative of Jehovah, and to none other could we come in a matter so vital to the honour and prestige of our Holy Place."

The leader of the deputation had become diplomatic, nor did he miss the mark.

"Leave me now. This matter of which thou hast spoken shall be considered in due course. I may even talk with Caiaphas myself upon it."

They had scarcely quitted the apartment when the veil of insincerity was flung aside from the face of Annas and the real man stood revealed. Leaping to his feet with surprising agility for one so old, he paced the room like a caged leopard. His face was livid. His eyes blazed as he smote his fist into the palm of the other hand, and muttered imprecations. That this Man should have declaimed His pernicious teachings within the Holy City itself were bad enough, but to presume thus to interfere with the policy of the one-time High Priest were more than flesh and blood could stand! Such presumption must be paid for! Jesus had flung down His challenge? Then He would find it had been taken up!

The outburst of furious indignation spent itself. Then reseating himself in his accustomed place, and exerting all his powers of self-control, he clapped his hands thrice. The attendant obeyed the summons, bowing low.

“Bid the lord Caiaphas repair hither instantly.”

While this was going on, Jesus found Himself besieged by the multitude, some anxious to obtain a personal word with Him, others just as plainly trying to overhear what was said. His exploit had been the one theme of conversation. In the bazaars, down by the gates, and in the Temple courts, His name was on every lip. The enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds, and indeed we were all stirred to the heart's core. The younger element, rejoicing in the chance of asserting itself, cheered and shouted with ebullient spirits, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The cry was taken up from the opposite side of the crowd, one party trying to outdo the other, when some of the priests pushing their way to His side demanded, “Hearest Thou what these say?”

“Yea,” He retorted, “have ye never read ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise’?”

While they withdrew, still with dignified air though inwardly wrathful because of their impotence, He went on with His work. He might cast out those who battered like vampires upon the

people's life, but He was infinitely more concerned about dispelling the graver ills that afflicted them. Love, not violence, was His supreme motive. And as He gave sight to the blind, healing to the maimed, and His divine comfort to the sorrowful, a greater urgency characterised His ministrations. Though we did not understand then, with deepened intensity He seemed to realise that the darkness of death's night would soon close about Him, and while the day lasted He must work the work of Him that sent Him.

Eventually, as the crowd began slowly to disperse for the evening meal, Jesus proposed that we also should leave, and we turned our steps towards Bethany. The day had not fulfilled our expectations, but it had at least been full of cheering signs. That onslaught on the Temple traffickers was a splendid augury of ultimate victory. How they had cowered before the Master's flashing gaze! And how signally had the whole affair appealed to the populace! Moreover, He had shown an unaccustomed willingness to gain their support, or so it appeared, by the gracious way in which He had fraternised with them afterwards. The kingdom was coming! It was now a matter only of days, perhaps hours, and the detested tyranny of the priestly hierarchy and of Rome would be broken. Toiling up the slopes of the Mount of Olives, I remember how we talked

with almost boyish enthusiasm. Jesus was a few paces in advance, apparently lost in thought. Did He know what was passing through our minds, or how we were still dreaming of temporal power? Assuredly, yet no word of warning or explanation could be spoken to men in that mood. He must wait.

Although we wended our way towards Bethany, the home of Lazarus was not our destination. Jesus loved that humble household too dearly to jeopardise its peace. If He were found there by His enemies after what had occurred, might that not involve those whose devotion had so often gladdened His heart? Even though He might long for the congenial and sympathetic atmosphere of that family, He dare not risk their safety. So, for the second night, we bivouacked beneath the trees. The air was warm; the light breeze was more than welcome after the heavy day in the sweltering heat of the city. And as some of us lay chatting on the ground, and others were disposing themselves to sleep, the Divine Master wandered away from the various other groups of pilgrims, scattered under the sheltering arms of the olive trees, that He might commune with the Unseen.

While night closed about Him, there were also some in Jerusalem to whom the darkness brought no sleep. A band of conspirators—an inner

circle of the Sanhedrin—had met in the house of Annas. Caiaphas, by virtue of his office, of course presided. There was one figure, however, whose venomous temper and subtle heart swayed the assembly. That was the ex-High Priest. Consequently, when the meeting broke up, a definite decision reached though the plans were still tentative, his will had been imposed on every member present. The stars of the Syrian sky looked down upon no sadder sight than that of these men, professed servants of the Almighty and pledged to uphold the right, who had determined to hound an innocent Man to His death.

IV

TUESDAY—A DAY OF CONTROVERSY

*"I saw a Ruler take his stand
And trample on a mighty land;
The People crouched before his beck,
His iron heel was on their neck,
His name shone bright through blood and pain,
His sword flashed back their praise again.*

*"I saw another Ruler rise—
His words were noble, good, and wise;
With the calm sceptre of his pen
He ruled the minds and thoughts of men:
Some scoffed, some praised—while many heard,
Only a few obeyed his word.*

*"Another Ruler then I saw—
Love and sweet Pity were his law:
The greatest and the least had part
(Yet most unhappy) in his heart—
The People, in a mighty band,
Rose up, and drove him from the land!"*

A. A. PROCTER.

THE TUESDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF CONTROVERSY

WHEN we bestirred ourselves that morning, the sun had long arisen, flinging aside night's dark draperies and cheerfully summoning the earth to awake. Jesus had already returned from His period of meditation and prayer. His soul was illumined with more than even the glory of the early skies. His urgent desire to be back in Jerusalem met with the readiest response on our part, for, in very truth, after the heart-stirring scenes of the previous two days, we felt that our glowing dreams must shortly come to pass. Some indication of this came from the Zealot.

"What think ye now?" he enquired of some of the brethren. "Shall we see Him enthroned by the acclamation of yonder people this day? Are all the promises to be fulfilled? Long have we waited, and at times I, for one, have been led to wonder if our trust in Him were misplaced, and whether His words about the new kingdom would ever be proved by the fact. But even now the hour may be approaching."

It is no exaggeration to say that we were car-

ried away by the speaker's burning suggestion. He had voiced only what we all felt. Swiftly completing our preparations, we joined Jesus on the road. We were in high spirits. The air was invigorating, and the vineyards and olive-yards, lying placid beneath the smile of the sun, glinted with a light which seemed an omen of coming success. Reaching the point we had passed the day before, we came to the fig tree on which we had vainly looked for fruit. Peter called the attention of Christ and the rest of us to it. "Master, the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away."

Probably few incidents in Christ's life have been criticized with so much freedom and yet such a lack of understanding as this. By some, the "cursing of the fig tree" has been regarded as a display of petulance altogether out of keeping with One so gracious. By others, with deep reverence for Jesus in their hearts, it has been felt to be almost an inconsistency in an otherwise perfect character. A word of explanation will answer the former and set at rest the doubts of the latter. A careful survey of what happened on the previous day yields little room for agreeing with Peter. Christ had said, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." But no balanced judgment could call that a curse. It may have been simply an observation that, as I have already

stated, the tree being in full leaf yet without any figs, it had never borne fruit nor ever would. There was something abnormal about it, and the sudden withering up further testified to that fact. If, on the other hand, Christ placed a ban upon it as a useless cumberer of the ground, there was still neither ill-temper nor petulance in His words. In this particular case, while for me the miraculous is above all question, I think the former is the more likely solution. The facts are, at any rate, against Peter's interpretation of the Master's words.

Later events showed that Peter could express himself in strong terms on occasion, and as happened fairly frequently, he construed Christ's words from his own personal viewpoint.

It is significant that our Lord offered no comment on Peter's explanation. He proceeded instead to expound a truth so obviously set forth by that withered tree. It was not only a type of Judaism, as has been advanced; it was also a graphic illustration of the fact that through prayer, the pretence and fruitlessness of the insincere life may give way to reality and fruitful service, and by faith even the apparently impossible can be achieved. "Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed,

and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all these things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Christ's coming to the city that day was awaited with interest. Everywhere, there was a buzz of excitement as He reached the Temple Courts. We were just mounting the steps when a small hand plucked His sleeve, and as Jesus turned, a sunny face crowned with a shock of raven curls looked up into His.

"Hail, Master!" It was a boy only about eight years of age. "Didst Thou hear me yesterday shouting 'Hosanna'?"

Jesus smiled at his earnestness and said, "Yea, verily, I did hear some one shouting so."

"It was I," cried the child, delightedly. And He took him up in His arms and blessed him.

As we talked with this one and that, we learned that the happenings of Monday had been freely discussed. Far into the night, in the various inns and caravanserais, people had been speaking of His onslaught upon priestly fraud and cupidity, and arguing about the effect it would have.

"'Twas scarce seemly thus to create an uproar in the very precincts of the Temple," remarked one. "After all, these merchants serve a useful purpose. Whither would strangers go to have the Roman coinage changed into the money of our fathers, but for these? Methinks, ye pil-

grims from the provinces are too thin of skin?" He sneered superciliously.

"'Tis plain to see that thou art of these parts, and thy reasonings—or lack of them—betray it! Wouldst thou be pleased to be openly defrauded by these soulless sycophants?" The man spoke with a north-country accent, and his face flushed under the tan as he turned fiercely upon the other.

"Not so much heat, my friend," retorted the first. "Those who come thus to the Feast should render some allegiance to the powers that be. It was the forethought of Annas which provided these facilities for the worshipper, and only by his permission were the changers given place at all, and . . ."

"And his solicitude for the stranger moved him thus to allow these villains to rob and exploit the poor pilgrim! Dost thou take us for simpletons? We may lack much the town-dweller has, but we are not so wholly devoid of sense. Why, it were good then that we should travel well armed against brigands, so that we might have the more of which to be plundered by these puppets of the High Priest! For myself, I praise the name of Jehovah that this Galilaean has proved their match! How they scurried before His burning words and uplifted scourge!" And the man laughed heartily at the recollection.

Several of the other travellers joined in the

mirth which ensued, but the first speaker, flinging up his beard with a look of disdain, lapsed into silence. Not so the rest. Questions passed from lip to lip concerning Christ's powers of healing, His Messianic claims, and the likelihood of conflict with the rulers should He persist in defying them. And the day was not far advanced before the prognostications of some were fulfilled.

The priestly party could not permit the offensive which Christ had begun to pass unnoticed, and the secret meeting of the night before had laid down the plan of campaign to be carried out. The Master sat in the cloisters with a group of people around Him. While a few were bent on playful banter, asking if the kingdom were to be established at once, and what emoluments He offered to those who might take service under His rule, these were only a minority. And the imperturbable good humour with which Jesus met their sallies, did much to disarm any criticism others might have been disposed to make. For the most part, however, the people were seriously minded. Many who had only heard of His fame welcomed the opportunity of listening to Him for themselves. While the manner in which He had embodied the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, no less than the unmistakable powers He wielded, gave rise to questions that clamoured for answer. So engrossed were the folk with His words that the

rude thrusting aside of some of their number took them wholly by surprise. Resentment flamed momentarily in their faces at the interruption. It as speedily died down. The newcomers were a deputation from the Sanhedrin.

The rulers' lack of courtesy was in part compensated for by their proud bearing and air of authority. Without waiting for Christ even to complete His sentence one of the Pharisees laid his hand, with an imperious gesture, upon the Teacher's arm. Christ looked fearlessly at the ruler and waited for him to speak.

"By what authority doest Thou these things? Who gave Thee this authority?"

If he and his companions expected to take Jesus off His guard by such an unwarranted intrusion, or if they thought He would be nonplussed by having His authority questioned before His adherents, they were mistaken. I wondered what He would say. Without a trace of annoyance, but with a half-pitying smile playing about His mouth, He replied: "I will also ask you one thing, which if ye tell Me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things."

The Pharisee's face relaxed somewhat. Jesus evidently meant to enquire whether they had any official standing in thus interrogating Him. If He wanted their credentials He could be easily satisfied. Their authority was Caiaphas. But

the man's mind ran in the wrong direction. He was totally unprepared for what followed.

"The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" demanded Jesus.

The ruler was discerning enough to see the bearing of the question. Without attempting to reply, he turned to those who accompanied him. Jesus had placed them on the horns of a dilemma. They discussed the situation with some misgiving.

"If we shall say 'from heaven,' He will say unto us, 'Why did ye not then believe him?' But if we shall say 'of men,' we fear the people, for all hold John as a prophet."

It was a difficult position for them, I admit. They were not prepared to open themselves to denunciation by the Galilaean by allowing that the Baptist held a divine commission. Yet to alienate the people's sympathy by belittling one who had laid hold of the popular imagination, and who also as a victim of the licentious Herod had become a national hero, might jeopardize the plans they cherished for the Teacher's overthrow.

Their reply was noncommittal. "We cannot tell."

In quiet, decisive tones Jesus answered, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." The craftily conceived trap had failed of its purpose.

Inwardly railing at their lack of success, the

proud members of the deputation gathered their robes together, while the crowd, now considerably increased, slowly parted to allow them to pass. Then Jesus raised His hand to restrain His questioners. "What think ye . . . ?"

The rulers wheeled about towards the Speaker. Truly, they thought, there was no limit to this Man's effrontery! Had He no respect for the leaders of the nation? Yet without waiting for any permission, they might deign to give, the Master began the story of the Two Sons. One churlishly refused his father's request that he would go to work in the vineyard, but then, relenting, went to do what was desired. The other gave a ready response, but instead of keeping his promise, he departed on some concerns of his own, and neglected the plain duty that filial obedience required. Jesus concluded the story with a question. "Which of the twain did the will of his father?"

The answer was quickly given. Obedience was shown by the son who went down to the vineyard, even though he had first declined to conform to his father's wishes.

That conclusion was precisely what Jesus expected; truth to tell, no other reply was possible. But although the priests had so clearly seized His point, they missed its bearing, and did not perceive how they had committed themselves. With

those keen eyes searching their hypocritical hearts, the Master spoke. "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards that ye might believe him."

That stung them to the quick! Even I winced at it. It were bad enough for the vain Pharisees to listen to such a biting reproof at any time, but to have to stand it in face of that multitude, plainly enjoying their discomfiture, were unendurable. Still, they had come to the source of Truth itself; they must take the consequences. They had thrust themselves within the sweep of that divine beam; their manifold defects must stand revealed. Christ had not, however, finished. With superb skill, He told the story of another vineyard. This had been entrusted to a group of husbandmen, who were to tend it to the best of their ability, but in proof of his confidence in them without any supervision by the owner. They, however, betrayed their trust in the most flagrant manner. When the master sent his servants to obtain some of the fruit, the vine-dressers cruelly maltreated them. A second party also received violent treatment. So ultimately, he sent his son to assert his ownership and call these

unworthy fellows to account. But they were now so steeped in crime that they were reckless. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." That course was adopted. The son was slain, his body flung over the walls, and the vineyard held as their own.

Again Christ turned to His critics, to ask their opinion. What would the owner do in such circumstances? The salutary lesson of a few minutes before ought surely to have put them on their guard, and I could not but wonder at their obtuseness. With almost childish simplicity, they answered, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

They had pronounced sentence upon their own base misuse of God's entrusted gifts. But the most scathing condemnation was yet to come. Jesus said, "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'? Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

It is always a fatal mistake to underrate one's adversary. The Sanhedrin, arrogant and self-opinionated, the custodian of sacred learning, looked with unconcealed scorn on the common people. The labouring classes of that day were largely illiterate, and easily swayed by prejudice. And Jesus belonged to the common people as truly as the people belonged to Him. Yet that did not mean He was not a match for the most brilliant dialecticians of the Pharisees. He had routed them in this latest encounter, and as the crowd was quick as we were to perceive, the honours lay with Him. The deputation withdrew. Foiled where it had been sure of victory, and with venom in its heart, it returned to Caiaphas.

But, as I well remember, the Master continued His parabolic teaching. He likened the kingdom of heaven to a marriage supper given by a king in honour of his son. The invitations were issued, the feast was in readiness, but the guests had not appeared. The king's servants, going to summon the tardy ones to the royal table, met with rebuffs in some cases, with violence in others. But while retribution was meted out to the wrongdoers, the feast could not be without its guests. So from the highway, the pilgrim, the wayfarer, and the casual passer-by, without reference to race or position, were summoned to the palace, and being furnished with suitable

attire for the occasion, were gladly welcomed by the sovereign. Only one who refused the festive raiment was excluded.

The meaning of the parable did not escape Christ's hearers. The privileges so jealously guarded by the elders had been openly abused or lightly esteemed. Familiarity with the gracious behests of God had bred contempt. But while they had thus effectually barred the gate of blessedness with their unbelief, a new door had been opened by the Divine hand. And He who Himself was "the way, the truth and the life," had come to lead them into that holy relationship with God in which the soul should find sustenance, companionship, and the signal honour of heaven's favour.

The Master's enemies had retired from the fray, but only for a time. They were afraid to move too precipitately lest a riot should occur, so they changed their tactics before renewing the assault. Their deliberate intention was either to entangle Him in replies to their leading questions, or else to goad Him into making some statement on which a reasonable charge might be based. A powerful ally could be of the greatest assistance in this direction. But to enlist the active help of the Herodians was a difficult matter. While these were still nominally Jews, they were also the avowed supporters of Herod's rule, and all

for which it stood. There was little love lost between them and the rigorous upholders of national institutions, but so fierce was the enmity which Jesus had aroused in combating spiritual wickedness in high places, that the Herodians consented to become party to the plot. The scheme suggested to them issued from the fertile mind of Annas, and it seemed almost certain of success. In fact, its ingenuity probably induced the Herodians to play the part assigned. The adroitness of the attack, the superficial politeness of address with which they came, revealed the master-mind of the prelate.

“Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man; for Thou regardest not the person of men.”

That is the way they spake. Such vain flattery revealed their mentality. But if they thus thought to ingratiate themselves with Jesus, or by smooth speech cover up the pit they had dug for His feet, they were mistaken.

“Tell us, therefore,” they continued, “what thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”

They were convinced that they had the Master at their mercy. Let Him affirm that tribute money should not be paid, and at once they could bring a charge against Him which would ensure

speedy punishment by the Roman authorities. On the other hand, let Him say it ought to be paid, and immediately they would stir up the passions of the people against Him, and so undermine His hold on them. He, posing as the Messiah, yet urging them still to wear the tyrant's yoke in mild submission? Truly, a patriot!

There was smug satisfaction on their evil faces as they awaited the reply which was irreparably to damage His influence whichever view He might take. But their self-complacency was shattered as when one flings a stone into a tranquil pool that mirrors the midnight moon.

The Master's look became severe as He confronted such duplicity.

"Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the tribute money."

Taking the proffered denarius, He enquired, "Whose is this image and superscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied, persuaded that He was but vainly trying to evade the question.

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and"—His eyes were fixed on theirs as He slowly finished the sentence—"unto God the things that are God's."

The blow was staggering, but argument was useless. The Herodians were defeated. I looked at my fellow-disciples, feeling that I could have shouted with delight. But the adept plotter be-

hind these controversies had prepared for every contingency. The Sadducees advanced as the third line of attack. Materialistic as they were, and frankly declaring their disbelief in any future life, their policy was to bring Christ into ridicule. They propounded a hypothetical case of a woman whose husband having died passed to each of his six brothers in turn. "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven?"

To me, the question seemed too absurd to merit serious consideration. But instead of the withering sarcasm which Jesus might have warrantably indulged, He spoke with a gracious restraint which must have made their shrivelled hearts quiver for an instant with a sense of shame. The proposition was so puerile.

"Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Bafflement was written on the faces of the controversialists. Growing admiration of the incomparable wisdom the Master possessed and the courage with which He had met and repelled His

antagonists filled the crowd. In the camp of the priests, however, there was consternation. Not only had things gone badly, but also every weapon they had fashioned against Jesus had been turned upon themselves. Every stone they had, metaphorically, hurled at Him had been used merely to strengthen His own fortifications. They might not acknowledge His superiority; that mattered nothing. The people whose loyalty they intended to subvert could not miss it. A young lawyer, eager to distinguish himself by both his daring and erudition, volunteered to lead a forlorn hope. The rest of his party kept at a discreet distance lest the crowd should suspect collusion. Going boldly up to Jesus, he asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Was this man sincere, I found myself asking, or was his question preparatory to further quibbling? But Jesus gave no hint that He thought anything was wrong. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The lawyer's face broadened into a smile. The Teacher had said nothing about keeping the Sab-

bath, about murder, adultery, stealing, and covetousness. Either He was unfamiliar with the full code or sought to improve on it, and, therefore, there was ground for discussion, but . . . Before the scribe could bring his weapons into play, something happened. What was it? Did some sudden compunction rise up within him? Or did the Master lay the spell of His wondrous personality upon his soul? Some explanation is required for what followed.

"Well, Master, thou hast said the truth." The lawyer seemed strangely moved. "There is one God, and there is none other but He. And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

The changed spirit of the man no less than the tone of his reply was surprising, but the Lord's word was more startling still. When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

However, instead of being softened by their comrade's change of attitude, the other scribes plainly showed their displeasure by dark scowls and muttered invective. Jesus turning to them asked, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

It was a question they had frequently debated in their assemblies, and the reply came instantly, "The Son of David."

The glib response evoked the further question, "How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool'? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his Son?"

Unable to answer, they slunk away as those whose resources had come unexpectedly to an end. And again the honours remained with the Master. Admittedly, the ordeal had been a trying one for Him. From four separate quarters the attack had been delivered, but He emerged triumphant. Instead of weakening His authority by thus seeking to disparage and ridicule Him before His admirers, it had the opposite effect. The common people heard Him gladly! Was He not the Christ of the human heart? That some of those folk were bent with life's loads, that their hands were rough with toil and their brows furrowed with care, made their need of His love more urgent. Besides, was He not of the seed of Abraham, and made in all things like unto His brethren? My own soul, like those of my fellow-disciples, gloried in the warm ties of that common humanity, binding Him, our divine Lord, to the race He came to bless.

The scribes and Pharisees had done their worst, but conduct is merely an indication of character. And Jesus, without bitterness, though doubtless His heart was hot with indignation, began to warn the multitude of the tyranny under which they chose to live. The rulers had usurped the righteous sway of Moses and while laying upon men's shoulders burdens grievous to be borne, they themselves did not raise even a finger to lift them. With broad phylacteries and bordered garments, they sought pre-eminence and adulation. To receive greeting in the markets, and be addressed as Rabbi flattered their vain souls. But that was not the basest thing about them. They shut the gates of the kingdom, and would neither go in themselves nor allow others to enter. They could devour widows' houses, but covered their base dishonesty with long prayers. Compassing sea and land to make a proselyte, they made him also a child of hell. Blind leaders of the blind, they professed to guide men, only to leave them floundering in a morass of doubt and disputings. These were all counts in the indictment of men who could tithe mint, anise, and cummin, and yet turn their backs upon judgment, mercy, and faith. Scrupulously they would cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, but within their hearts were extortion and excess. Like the sepulchres which were

whitewashed so that none might stumble upon them in the night and so be ceremonially defiled, and which appeared so fair in the moonlight, these shameless pretenders to a religious life were full of corruption and insincerity.

Suddenly Christ's tone changed. Looking at the troubled faces before Him, and glancing beyond to the city which lay about the Temple, He broke into a lament which is unsurpassed in the annals of men. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.' "

Evening was at hand when the Master indicated His wish to depart and began to make His way through the multitude. We did not know it then, but this was the last time He was to tread the sacred courts of His Father's house. Something impelled Him to walk towards the Sanctuary itself. He paused a moment at the entrance. A ceaseless stream of worshippers still flowed to the Holy Place, and Jesus watched the diverse ways in which they comported themselves. There were men of rank and wealth, as well as

those of the humbler orders, and Jesus looked at the former as they ostentatiously opened their purses and taking out their gifts, cast them with a flourish of the hand into the treasury. His attention centred, however, on a woman who had shrunk aside to permit one of the lordly merchants to take precedence. By her attire, one could see that not only was she a widow, but also poor. A feeling of compassionate interest in her filled the Saviour's heart. Perhaps she reminded Him of another widow—His mother! With averted gaze, as though ashamed at the poverty of her gift, she slipped two mites into the treasury, then stole away.

"Saw ye that?" Jesus pointed in the direction of the retreating figure. "Of a truth I say unto you that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

I have since thought that to give one's utmost to God's service is the greatest honour mortals can know. He who gave His best to man in the gift of His Son, deserves the best we can offer in return. And the heart's richest devotion, the life's lowliest service, mean much to Him who later commended the cup of cold water given in His name.

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We supplement Thomas's view with a lovely legend of a poor acrobat who, becoming a convert to the faith, entered a monastery as a lay brother. He was unable to write more than his own name, and could read only the simplest words with difficulty. To learn and repeat the Paternoster and the Credo presented an almost insuperable obstacle in his path. Yet he longed to show his devotion to his new-found Lord. Disheartened by his slow progress, what could he do? In a remote gallery of the monastery hung a picture of Christ upon the Cross, and gazing upon it in wonderment, suddenly an idea struck him. Laying aside his habit, he commenced to do his old acrobatic feats before the canvas. Then at last he sank to the floor. He was out of training and his efforts had exhausted him. While he lay there, the Christ slipped out from the gilt frame, and with gentle hand wiped the perspiration from the old brow. It is only a legend, and of course there is nothing in it—except a sublime truth crudely bodied forth. While Christ merits the best service we can render, yet the smallest gifts He will not despise. As Browning says in another connection:

“God who registers the cup
Of mere cold water, for His sake
To a disciple rendered up,
Disdains not His own thirst to slake

At the poorest love was ever offered:
And because it was my heart I proffered,
With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow Him
For ever, my own way."

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The lingering flush of the dying day, continues Thomas, lay upon the beautiful walls of the Temple as Jesus took His last farewell of that place of tender and yet sad associations. We Apostles, prosaic though we were, were impressed by the sight. As we pointed out its gorgeous columns, its fine sculpture, and how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, the Master assented. Then He added, "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." And pondering these cryptic words, again we followed Him to the quiet which lay beyond the populous city.

V

WEDNESDAY—A DAY OF PLOTTING

*"From all vain pomp and shows,
From the pride that overflows,
And the false conceits of men,
From all the narrow rules,
And subtleties of schools,
Poor sad Humanity
Through all the dust and heat
Turns back with bleeding feet
By the weary road it came,
And finds the simple thought,
By the Great Master taught,
And that remaineth still:
Not he that repeateth the Name, . . .
But he that doeth the Will."*

LONGFELLOW.

THE WEDNESDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF PLOTTING

IT was preposterous! Must the whole body of official Judaism, comprising some of the most brilliant brains of the day, look on impotently while an obscure Nazarene controlled the situation? That was the opinion freely expressed in the house of Caiaphas, although it was long afterwards that I heard of it. Christ's unconventional ways, distasteful to those whose prejudice surged upwards at the sight of anything new, were bad enough. His outspoken criticisms of what passed as orthodox religion, together with His unmeasured scorn for those who posed as the leaders in spiritual things, were worse. Yet the bigoted priests laid the unctuous balm to their souls that good men are seldom appreciated by the herd. They accepted such misunderstanding as part of the price that sanctity must pay! But when Jesus had the audacity to leave the unthinking masses of the provinces, and carry the war into His enemies' camp, it was adding insult to wounded pride. For one thing, He had surprised the rulers by His tenacious hold on men's affections. They had thought that the itinerant Preacher would

soon exhaust His oratorical resources, but for three years His influence had widened and deepened. His reputed powers showed no signs of diminution. Though representatives of the Sanhedrin had questioned the validity of His claims repeatedly, though they had attempted to discredit Him by attributing His miracles to demoniacal possession, the people as a whole remained unconvinced.

Things had reached a crisis when, a few weeks before the Passover, it was reported that He had raised Lazarus from the dead. That was too near Jerusalem to be hidden. The news travelled and it lost nothing in transmission. When the wily Annas heard of the sensation this miracle had created, he saw that something must be done speedily. But what? That was the difficulty. How to remove this Man without stirring up a hornets' nest and bringing Pilate's vengeance upon himself gave him cause for deep thought. How to evolve a scheme which would work out swiftly and quietly was his problem. A private consultation with his son-in-law followed; it was not that he placed much reliance upon Caiaphas. He saw, however, that the position must be handled constitutionally. Caiaphas was in power. Only he could lay the facts before the Sanhedrin, and perhaps bring its members to act with some degree of unanimity. They might suspect an

ulterior motive if Annas took an active part in it, or even resent his interference. Moreover, bringing Caiaphas into it held another advantage. Should Pilate take umbrage and suppress any attempt to silence the Nazarene, his anger would be directed against the man nominally responsible, and Caiaphas would prove the scapegoat.

Subsequently, a meeting of the Sanhedrin was called. Caiaphas, who presided, listened impartially while the position was discussed. The rulers were practically of one mind. Christ's power in the nation generally, and in Jerusalem particularly, was becoming a grave menace to their authority. One of them declared quite openly that the matter must be grappled with. "What do we, for this man doeth many miracles? If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him; and the Romans shall come and take away our place and nation."

The gravity of the situation was generally admitted. Was He waiting only until He felt strong enough to head a revolt like that of Judas, of Gamala? An assault upon the Temple authorities, and the consequent upheaval in Jerusalem could have only one result. Rome was very tolerant of the nations under her rule. Their religious beliefs and superstitions were their own business, but for anything savouring of rebellion she had

no pity. Ruthless repression would be the order of the day.

It may seem to you almost beyond belief that men thus presumably consecrated to the service of God could act in this manner. Fatal familiarity with holy things—and we all run that risk—had, however, dulled their sense of right. I remember something which the rabbi of our village told me when I was a boy. There was a mythical enchantress, named Circe, of whom he had read in the writings of Greece. She was reputed to be constantly on the watch for any who might visit her island home. Then she would give them to drink from a magic cup. The potion was sweet to the taste, but it had terrible consequences. Those who drank it were immediately changed into the form of beasts. Is it too severe to suggest that there was almost a parallel to that in these antagonists of Christ? I do not think so. They had drunk the draught of selfish ambition and quest of temporal supremacy, and all traces of honour and humanity had been banished from their hearts.

Caiaphas listened cynically to the arguments put forward by one and another. His intention was to let the Council discover its helplessness in order that he might eventually force his will—or rather that of his father-in-law—upon it. Some advised instant action, yet they were unable to

decide what it were best to do. Others urged delay, yet knowing all the time that delays were dangerous! Rising in his place, and lifting his hand to indicate that he had a pronouncement to make, the High Priest waited. Every eye was fixed on him. The moment was dramatic in the extreme. With an air of solemnity, he said, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

At last the truth was out! Those two words—"for us"—showed the motive which animated the head of the Sanhedrin. There was only one way to restore priestly prestige and remove the obstacle lying in the path. Jesus must die. There was but one party which could secure that desirable end. That was themselves. And Caiaphas adjourned the assembly with that idea firmly implanted in the minds of the rulers. But since that meeting, events had moved rapidly. The Nazarene had been hailed as the long-awaited Messiah, and the multitude had become increasingly a factor with which to reckon. Moreover, by His attack on the merchants of the Temple, He had declared open war on the priests. At the instigation of Annas, certain parties had in turn tried to show the absurdity of His claims. But, for the first time in a long life, the ex-High Priest had been out-generalled at every point. Now the hour

for firm measures had come. Jesus must be captured. If not by fair means, then—with diplomacy. Were they not invested with supreme authority in all religious matters? Would not the people expect them to act with decision and despatch? So a further assembly of the Sanhedrin was summoned.

My informant told me that Caiaphas at once laid before the elders the business they had previously discussed, and urged that, without further hesitation, steps must be taken to have Jesus slain. He built up a strong case against Him, and did it with such apparent integrity of purpose, that it looked as though he would carry his point. But as he resumed his seat, he was irritated to note that, in spite of all he had said, there were still some who ventured to dissent. A few like Nicodemus seemed unaccountably bent on treating Jesus as though He were entitled to some semblance of justice. Certainly, they were a minority, but not a negligible one, for their influence affected others who were averse to any definite step because none appeared to give much assurance of success. The proceedings had reached a standstill when an official of the Sanhedrin approached, and spoke to Caiaphas in a subdued voice. An involuntary start showed the High Priest's surprise. A moment later, a stranger was ushered into the chamber. His attire be-

tokened the northern province. There was something decidedly unprepossessing about him. His beady eyes, dazzled by the abrupt change from the semi-gloom where he had been forced to wait, looked cautiously around. And a certain stealthiness in the man's movements, almost feline, gave an impression of cunning and capacity for intrigue. It was Judas, the man of Kerioth and my fellow-disciple!

How came he, one of the Twelve, to such depths of treachery? You may well ask. But another pertinent question precedes that. How did Judas become a member of the Apostolic company at the outset? Was he divinely ordained for the nefarious part he subsequently played? That is unthinkable, for it would make him merely a passive instrument in the hands of a higher power. Moreover, the entire weight of evidence is against such a suggestion. He was later held in the utmost horror by us all. We knew him intimately, and had ample opportunity for gauging the man. Why then was he chosen? Because Christ called him not to apostasy, but apostleship. He was, like most of us—though possibly to a larger degree—a strange mixture of good and bad. The discerning eyes of the Master saw that. There was potential evil in the man; there were also great possibilities of good. It was for the latter he was called to the divine service.

No one could know the Judas of the early days without feeling that he was a man of fine gifts. He had the acumen of the business man, and that grasp of details which is essential to success. That was quickly seen when he joined our company. We were so impressed with his ability that he was made treasurer of our funds. True, there was little margin in that direction; all the more reason, therefore, that they should be carefully administered. Skill and foresight were requisite for one who was expected to keep the needs of the company supplied.

There came a day, however, when Judas got out of step with his Master. What the reason was we do not know. Deterioration had set in. He was not the man he had once been. And whether we all perceived it or not, two certainly did—Jesus and Judas. Meanwhile, though nothing definite could be laid at his door, it was felt that he was not altogether satisfactory. But as I have said, his heartless comment when Mary lavished her love-gift upon Christ marked the parting of the ways. After the friends had dispersed that night Peter, who often spoke without thinking but seldom thought without speaking, was not held back by any fear of wounding Judas's susceptibilities. He told him in no uncertain manner what we felt about it. But the man was revealed in his true character. Avaricious, and

devoid of any consideration for either another's feelings or the fitness of things, could we henceforth have anything in common with such a fellow? Judas saw that he had forfeited any respect we ever had for him. His position had become untenable.

Then his deepening dissatisfaction with the course events were taking, prompted him to take the step which has blackened his name as the vilest of traitors. More than once, Jesus had not used the chances which came His way. At the beginning of that very week the whole city was at His feet. The populace was stirred to the depths. He had but to apply a spark, and the fires of rebellion would have blazed up with irresistible force. There were some who would have thrust Caiaphas from the seat of power, investing Jesus with those sacred rights. They might even have assailed the imperial authority. Yet what had happened? Jesus let the opportunity pass. Instead of seizing the hour and realizing its possibilities to the full, He left the eager crowds and wandered away from the proffered gifts of fortune. Was that the way to redeem those promises for which His friends had sacrificed everything? So the traitor reasoned, and all his mercenary instincts rose in revolt. The one thing remaining for him was to gather together what he could from his ruined hopes of

a kingdom, and make his escape as expeditiously and unobtrusively as possible. Yet that was what troubled him. There was really nothing to be gained out of the wreck. He had wasted nearly three years in which he could have made enough to yield some solid comfort, and now he was confronted with the prospect of starting anew at the bottom unless . . . He thrust the thought from him like a viper. At least, so I would fain think. But with maddening insistency it returned again and again. He heard the voice of temptation in the night as he turned matters over in his mind: it sounded in the daytime, even while our Master taught. Why should not Judas turn his power to account? He had something which was worth a goodly sum to those who desired the downfall of the Nazarene. He could apprise them of the time and place where an arrest could be made secretly, so that the tumult they feared would be avoided, and the whole plan carried through with privacy and success. That would yield him what?—Judas felt a strange glow as he tried to estimate the price such information was worth.

“A thousand pieces of silver? Well, if values are fixed by supply and demand, then the demand is as great as the supply is small. I am the only one who can give them what they require. It should surely bring a thousand, even though—

soulless clod as he is—Caiaphas may not offer more than five hundred!”

Another voice made itself heard. “But what of thy Master? Is it thus thou wouldest repay His confidence in thee and the love He has shown? Thou callest those years wasted in which thou hast been kept from the money-mill, but He has sought to impart heavenly lore to thee, rich beyond the price of rubies! And thou wouldest sell Him into the hands of His foes?”

Judas winced! It was as though an invisible hand had struck him savagely. Then, to silence forever the accusing conscience within he squared his shoulders and replied to that inner voice, “As if He were not more than enough for them all! How many times have they sought to entrap Him in His words, but He has foiled them! They have laid snares innumerable for His feet, but He is too wary. Besides, if He be the Son of God, as perchance He may, what power can injure Him? Will not angelic legions swoop to His aid? Meanwhile, I shall be leagues away with the silver safe in my purse! My bargain is merely to lead them to Him; whether they can hold Him or not is their concern, not mine.”

Swift as lightning, these thoughts passed again through the mind of Judas while he waited. Then, seeing that Caiaphas beckoned him to ap-

proach, he went forward. First informing them who he was, he laid his scheme for betraying Jesus before them. It looked feasible enough, and after a brief discussion, the Council assented to his suggestion. But he was disconcerted to find that there was no mention of any pecuniary reward for his services. Judas was not the man to stand on ceremony. He was desperate. Bluntly he asked for his thousand pieces of silver. The face of Caiaphas flushed angrily.

"Silver! For what? For serving thy nation and acting as becometh a worthy son of Abraham against One who hath misled the people and maligned their rulers? Surely that were reward enough. Besides, there is added to it thy revenge upon Him who hath aroused thy hatred. That is enough."

"Enough!" A snarl of anger escaped the infuriated man. It was only the sight of the armed attendants which kept him from dealing his adversary a blow. "I offer to put this Man in thy power, and thou dost insult me with empty words? Let a just price be fixed and I am content. If not, then I refuse to proceed with this project as ye desire."

It was with difficulty that Caiaphas restrained himself. To loose his own passions would be only to invite defeat. The aid Judas offered was too valuable to forego. His mind was working

swiftly. "Thy rough words deserve chastisement, but it shall not be said that the Elders seek service for nought. Thirty pieces shall be weighed out to thee when the prisoner is in our hands."

"Thirty? Fathers and brethren, call ye that a fair return for One of such importance to your plans?" Judas turned to the assembly hoping that some would intervene on his behalf, but every member sat stolid and silent.

"Thou hearest my words," cried the High Priest. "Thirty pieces of silver is the price fixed." His anger was at white-heat, but he still kept himself in hand.

"I agreed to nothing."

"So? Didst thou not agree to deliver this Man unto us? Well, that sum is thine when earned, and—failure to complete thy bargain is death."

Judas started, aghast, but Caiaphas continued. "Thou didst not think of that? Thou camest hither of thine own choice, and hast stumbled into the pit thou didst dig for another. Thou hast committed thyself to this course. Demur, and even now yonder messenger shall bring Simon Peter here immediately, that he may learn from us the purport of thy errand. Ah, thou palest! Thou wilt rather choose to obey the Sanhedrin than die the death of a traitor at the hands of thy fisher friends? So be it! Let word be brought

to us on the morrow, and ere long thou shalt see this Jesus duly recompensed of His nation."

Bewildered, numb with fear, Judas found himself in the dark street. The myriad stars above him were like so many accusing eyes, and outraged conscience scourged him with its whip.

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We turn aside from the narrative to recall the plaint of one of a later day:

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
Perjury, perjury in the highest degree;
Murder, stern murder in the direst degree:
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty! Guilty!'"

How came Judas thus to fall so vilely? It is the story of gradual declension. The blame was entirely his own. Good and evil exist side by side in every heart. Even Paul felt that. "When I would do good, evil is present with me." But the difference between the two men was this: Judas allowed evil to get the upper hand; Paul sought that divine grace by which he overcame evil with good. Dreadful possibilities lie latent in the life. But there are also glorious possibilities. Ribera, the Spanish painter, came to a mastery of his art only through severe self-discipline and sacrifice. As a youth, almost destitute,

he supported himself while he continued his studies by obtaining any kind of work he could. He was engaged one day, painting a sign for a shopkeeper, when a wealthy cardinal of the church, driving past, noticed him. The shabby clothes, the pale, drawn face on which want had graven deep furrows, awakened the cardinal's pity. So he stopped to question the youth. Learning that his ambition was to become an artist, he took Ribera with him to Rome. There the youth had more than heart could wish. In the house of his patron, he found both luxury and ease. The lines had truly fallen for him in pleasant places! Yet before many months had passed, Ribera made a discovery. He was losing all aptitude and inclination for work. His sumptuous surroundings and the enervating atmosphere in which he lived, were ruining any talent that he possessed. He was steadily deteriorating. Only one course was open to him. The path to self-control, honour, and industry, lay through sacrifice. He dreaded being thought in any way ungrateful; to lose his soul was worse. Turning his back on Rome, he set out on foot for Naples. He had to sell part of his clothing to obtain food as he journeyed. But at length, foot-sore and weary, yet with a new-found sense of freedom and self-mastery in his breast, he reached his destination. There he recommenced his arduous

task. Step by step he mounted the precipitous slopes of achievement, and overcoming all obstacles, at last gained the high tableland of fame. If only Judas had fought his lower self thus! No soul need fail; no soul need fall. "Let us search and try our ways." Keep step with the Master, and strong and happy companionship is assured. But, "eternal vigilance is the price of safety."

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That Wednesday morning, resumes Thomas, contrary to the plans on which we had counted, the Master seemed unwilling to leave our retreat on Olivet. And although we debated the reason among ourselves, none of us felt that he could ask for any explanation. It certainly could not be that Jesus had anything to fear. The superb manner in which He had vanquished His foes the day before made it improbable that any further attacks would come from that quarter. Besides, while the excitement had died down somewhat, we were convinced that His hold on the people was as strong as ever. The morning wore on. As we sat about waiting for Him to indicate what His plans were, we could see the Holy City in the distance, gleaming just like an opal in the sunlight. What Jesus had said the previous evening regarding the destruction of the Temple had been in our minds, and the hour seemed opportune to

ask Him more about it, especially, though I did not quite know why at that time, because Judas was not with us.

“Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” we enquired.

In vivid colours, the Lord painted a picture which even the least responsive of us could appreciate, although its graphic imagery and the severity of the divine chastisement almost overwhelmed the mind. The sun of Judah’s glory would be eclipsed; the darkness of desolation would overspread the land. Wars and rumours of wars; nation grappling with nation and kingdom with kingdom in the throes of death; famine, pestilence, and earthquakes;—these would compound the cup of judgment which God’s ancient people, as well as unrepentant mankind generally, must drink. Moreover, even we who, in spite of our unworthiness, had enjoyed the inestimable boon of Christ’s companionship, would be caught in the whirlpool of persecution and hate.

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you. And ye shall be hated of all nations for My name’s sake.”

I confess that my heart sank as I listened. Could we endure to the end, as He counselled? Or would we be found among the many who should be offended? While He spoke plainly of

Jerusalem's doom, He was not so explicit regarding His second advent, or else our minds failed to discern His meaning clearly. But He did say that the exact hour was hidden from even Him. Yet one felt that it was inopportune to ask further questions just then. The Saviour's heart was full as He spake; we could see that. Despite all its perversity and unbelief, He loved Jerusalem. But He knew that like a tall tree of the forest, with all the appearance of a strong and vigorous life, she was hollow at heart, and the tempest would lay her low. The friction between Judah and her conquerors could not continue indefinitely. The day must come when, Rome's patience exhausted, she would arise with irresistible anger and take vengeance upon her recalcitrant subjects. Then woe unto those who would be crushed beneath the iron heels of her legions. Nor were the words concerning Jerusalem's doom unwarranted. "Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled."

You will be well aware that, within forty years of that time, Christ's prophecy was carried out to the letter. My brethren, Peter and John, were imprisoned more than once. James was put to the sword by Herod Agrippa. While death in various forms sealed the testimony of others. Plots and counterplots made the capital like a

seething pot, and Rome decided that she could tolerate the situation no longer. Cestius Gallus was despatched with an armed force to capture the city, but finding the resistance stronger than he had calculated, he withdrew. But it was merely to give place to another warrior. Vespasian, having first subdued Galilee, marched on Jerusalem and invested its walls. He was recalled to Rome to receive the imperial purple, and Titus took command of the besiegers. His most formidable allies, Famine and Death, stalked through the streets. Try as I may, my pen cannot portray the misery of those days. At last, torn by civil strife and subdued by hunger, the defences broke down. The Temple had already suffered by fire, and by the instructions of Titus, not one stone remained upon another. "This generation shall not pass," the Master had said. Alas, how blind man's soul becomes through persistent sinning.

But I have wandered from my theme. Seeing the grave concern on our faces, Jesus began to encourage our hearts anew, so that we might be more intent on doing His will than fearing what might befall us. While, therefore, He bade us ever to be on the alert, He also enjoined faithfulness. Never can I forget His story of the servant whose lord, going on a journey, left him in charge of the household. Returning unexpect-

edly, how his spirit would be gladdened if he found that his trust had been respected. "Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods." But if the lord's absence had meant slackness and indifference that could merit only fullest condemnation.

This was followed by that parable of the Ten Virgins. Jesus was incomparable when He bodied forth truth in this memorable fashion. I who had been so long accustomed to the tedious hair-splitting of the Scribes, and the dry and uninteresting teachings droned out by the rabbis, probably appreciated it better than most.

We had never thought of our marriage customs before in this way. It was the usual thing for the bridegroom to meet his friends first before going to claim the bride at her parents' home. Frequently there would be delay in starting. There were preliminary rejoicings which were at times protracted. And so the maidens who were deputed to meet the bridegroom and accompany him to the bride's door were kept waiting in uncertainty. That gives the key to Christ's story. In this case, so long was the bridegroom in coming that they fell asleep. Then, in the distance, the shouts of the revellers eventually heralded his approach. Waking with a start, the escort found their lamps had burned out. Five girls, however, were prepared for such an emergency. They had

brought an additional supply of oil with them. The rest had, perforce, to go in quest of some. Before they could get back, however, the bridal party had arrived, and welcomed by the five waiting virgins, the door closed behind them. The rest paid the price of unpreparedness. And the Master summed up His story with those pregnant words, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

The tale of the Talents followed naturally on this. Again some men were put on their honour as their lord entrusted to them five talents, two talents, and one talent respectively. The first two used their substance to such good purpose that their capital was doubled, and both received their lord's commendation for their fidelity. The third, despising the one talent, showed that his master had well gauged his character. He had buried the money in the ground, and afterwards, with bitter complaints, handed it back to his lord.

It seemed to me as I listened to these solemn words that they were peculiarly applicable to one like myself. There in the apostolic company, we were certainly men of varying gifts. While, I suppose, at times we envied Peter, James and John, because Jesus admitted them to closer intimacy than the rest of us, I could not be blind to the fact that they were more richly endowed than

the remainder. For example, I lacked the initiative of Peter, the courage James possessed, and that remarkable intuitiveness which enabled John to understand our Master better than we could. But, on the other hand, we all had the privilege of being counted among His chosen friends. And the only thing He asked was that we should be as true to Him as He was true to us.

I could not pursue this line of thought further at that time. The Master swept us along by His impassioned description of things yet to be. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations."

"The throne of His glory?" The idea dazzled our minds for a moment. I saw Peter who had been gazing listlessly across at the distant city suddenly flash a look of delight at his brother. Simon the Zealot instinctively lifted his head like one who heard the call to battle. While even the guileless Nathanael—a true saint if ever there was one—caught at the Master's word which revived memories of Christ's first meeting with him. There was to be a throne, then, in spite of the baffled hopes of that week? Yea, but not as we still fondly dreamed. Much was to happen first. The Master was to be further humiliated before the day of exaltation dawned. Before He

came to sovereignty He was to plumb for us depths of agony and shame as yet unsounded. But as He went on speaking of the judgment to come, I realised that it had a bearing on the present. The lowliest service rendered to men for the love of Christ was invested with the insignia of heaven. The mightiest motive in the world is love, and the greatest love that can burn in the human breast is that inspired by Christ. Thus He said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Yet the heart that spurns the love divine, and that turns callously from human need as though no claim could be made upon its aid, should be guilty not only of wasted opportunities, but also of neglecting the Lord Himself.

This day of retirement came to an end, but as I now look back, thankful is my heart that our divine Master spent it with us instead of going to Jerusalem. With all our faults, we were more receptive than the Temple crowds would have been. And, besides, there was so much we needed to learn from His lips if we were to be fitted for the onerous tasks the future held. Christ had trusted us with His prophetic picture of Jerusalem's downfall; but He had also honoured us with the task of aiding Him in blessing the world. As watchers for the heavenly Bridegroom, our lamps of witness were to be kept replenished with

the oil of grace. As servants, with varying talents, but with a common obligation to be faithful, we were to do our utmost with the opportunities life might yield. As friends of this divine King, we were to prove our love and discipleship by serving those about us. Thus at the last we might hear not only the blessed words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," but also that gracious invitation, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger and ye took Me in: naked and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. . . . Inasmuch . . ."

VI

THURSDAY—A DAY OF FAREWELLS

*"Stand fast when waves of trouble roll
And drench your life with tears,
When tribulation smites your soul
And daunts your heart with fears;
For, though the storm be ne'er so high,
Be sure the calm of peace is nigh.*

*"Stand fast when all the powers of night
Affright your shrinking heart,
When not a star betrays its light
To serve as guide and chart;
For, be the darkness ne'er so deep,
Ere dawn your weary eyes shall sleep.*

*"Stand fast! The coward never knows
The thrill of victory won;
'Tis toil that brings the best repose,
As night precedes the sun;
And naught proclaims the conquering soul
Like patience, faith, and self-control."*

THE THURSDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF FAREWELLS

DOUBTER though I may be called, it must in fairness be admitted that I was not the only one of our company who was afflicted with misgivings and uncertainty. Although Christ had spoken so frankly about what the future held, the following day found us again in that mood when nothing seemed to matter. Our recent experiences had tended to make us the victims of despondency. We had, as you will well believe, traversed the entire range of emotions. High on the summit of confident hope, we had been thrilled by the sight of Christ's triumphal entry, His expulsion of the traffickers, and His unqualified victory over the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. But then despair had engulfed us as we noted His complete indifference to the advantages which these conquests had secured. How could we reconcile His willingness to receive the homage of the crowds, and the approval evoked by His later exploits, with this continued withdrawal from the scene of His prowess?

Simon the Zealot gritted his teeth.

"Well is it for thee to bid me wait in patience,"

he cried, as I vainly tried to calm his fretful spirit. "Can we not urge the Master to act without further delay? Thou knowest that only while the iron gloweth can the smith fashion it as he would. So view I the temper of the people. Let the metal cool and who can do aught with it? And yet He doth remain here, losing all that He hath gained. Nor is that the full sum. . . ."

"That may be as thou sayest, and yet surely He knoweth best." I was nettled by Simon's outburst, for we all had as much at stake as he.

"What I was about to say is this," he went on. "Jesus is so full of love for men, and trusteth in their goodness of heart so much, that I fear He doth not perceive what may be afoot. Thou thyself sawest how, after He had driven those polluters forth from the Temple, the rulers came to demand His authority. Knowest thou why? Their enquiry was only a pretence. Their real object was to poison the hearts of men against Him. And even now, while we tarry here on Olivet, my belief is that they still pursue their evil work. The Master hath left them a clear field for their scandalous plottings."

"Well do I understand thy fears, but what can we do?"

"That is my reason for speaking unto thee. Thou also art a man of affairs, and knowest the wickedness of the world as our Lord doth not.

Let us go to Him—lay the issues before Him, plead with Him if not for His own sake alone, then for ours also. Have we not forsaken all things for the sake of that cause He came to espouse? And all our brethren are of the same mind.”

“Suppose we speak of this to James of Zebedee,” I countered. “He possesseth the Lord’s confidence, and perhaps his word would carry greater weight.”

James was so impressed by the earnestness of our fellow-disciple that, although with some diffidence, he fully told Jesus how the Zealot felt. The Master smiled indulgently.

“And what didst thou counsel our brother?” He enquired.

“Why, Lord, I advised patience and trust in Thy wisdom.”

“Thou didst well! Patience and trust shall yet meet their full reward, and by and by, ye shall see in very truth that your Master careth more for the ultimate success of His mission than even His most ardent disciple.”

Peter and John had been standing a little distance away, as though waiting to speak with Him. Jesus beckoned them to His side.

“Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover?” I heard them ask, thinking to myself that this was rather an

astute way of getting Him back to the city.

The question did not seem to be altogether unexpected, for immediately our Lord replied, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him; and wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, 'The Master saith, where is the guest-chamber where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared. There make ready for us."

This arrangement had been made by a sympathiser whom we afterwards knew as the father of John Mark. Some time earlier in the week he had offered Christ the use of his house to celebrate the feast, though without giving the exact location. There were two reasons for this. One was that he knew he was running considerable risk in thus harbouring One against whom the fiat of the priests had gone forth; the other was that he was certain that Jesus would wish to enjoy that period free from molestation. So he had himself planned that, at a given hour, a trusted messenger should be at the spring. He would be on the look-out for some of the disciples, and by an inclination of the head or a flash of the eyes that none but they could interpret, he would establish recognition. Then following him at a discreet distance, the Master's friends would be

guided to the house of His host. In this way, the place could be kept secret, and His leisure remain undisturbed.

Just as Jesus had spent the preceding day in fellowship with us, imparting those counsels of which we should stand in such need after He had left us, so He now sought to devote this day, or at least the earlier part of it, to fellowship with His Father. We saw Him walk quietly away, and instinctively we knew He desired to be alone. It was after midday when Peter and John returned, having carried out their commission. Jesus was still absent, and I fear their enquiry as to His whereabouts was not answered very graciously. All we knew with any certainty was that the precious hours of that week were slipping by, and nothing was being accomplished. Simon the Zealot was right! His opinions were shared by us all. Why did not the Master act while the hour was propitious?

When Jesus at length reappeared, He found us deplorably irritable. He knew it were idle to remonstrate with men in that frame of mind, or even to try to confide His plans to them. Judas had rejoined us, and looked strangely ill at ease. For an hour or more, he had been sitting alone, with his back against a tree and his knees drawn up under his chin, as though he felt his unpopularity.

In truth, he was now cordially disliked after what had happened. Possibly he would have quitted Olivet altogether, but for the fear that suspicions might be aroused, and awkward enquiries instituted. There was not, however, the slightest danger of that as far as we were concerned, because we were in complete ignorance of the treachery in his bad heart. And yet, everything to a man in his state must have seemed like an evil omen. His soul was already in hell.

The torrid heat of the afternoon passed as the sun moved towards the west. Then as it began to sink with a flaming ray, a cool breeze sprang up from the surrounding hills, and gently stirred the clustering leaves of the olive grove. Jesus rose from the place where for a time He had been reclining like the rest of us, and intimated that we should journey to the city. But instead of awakening an eager response, it caused fresh disaffection, though our protests were confined to one another.

"Now that the day is gone, and with it the chances thereof," one complained, "we go to Jerusalem! Doth not the Master know that we are weary with a day of fruitless inactivity? And now He must needs take us thither!"

We trailed after Him, through the olive-yards, across the brook Kidron, and up the steep way leading towards the gates, still muttering com-

ments on the idle quest on which we were led. Would that we had tried to understand! He had done all He could in face of the reprehensible opposition of the Elders. Jerusalem's day of salvation had passed; its sun had set. And now His mission must be carried to its consummation, not for the chosen people alone, but for the whole human race.

At last the Upper Room, afterwards to become the centre of so many poignant memories, was reached. The brazen ewer and basin stood suggestively by the door, but we purposely ignored them. There were other matters in our minds. Soon the unseemly wrangle for precedence, of which I cannot now think without a pang, was at its height. Jesus had taken His place. The dispute had become acrimonious, when suddenly He rose, and walked to the door.

"The Master is grieved, and goeth forth until peace prevail," was my first thought. It was certainly not without cause. But Jesus had another object in view. Laying aside His robes without a word, He took a towel and slave-wise tied it loosely about His waist. Then to our astonishment, He bore the vessels to where we sat. Thaddeus was at the extreme left of the table. Jesus knelt before him, and pouring water over his unsandalled feet, He then dried them. Christ, the Lord of glory, thus performing the

task of a menial? We looked on, overwhelmed with shame that not one of us had offered to do this service for his brethren. One by one, we submitted to the ministrations of those divine hands, till the dust and grit of the road were removed.

At length, He came to Judas. A shudder ran through the man as Christ touched those feet which only the day before, as I subsequently learned, had gone on the blackest errand man ever took. The way he bit his lips must have been to keep back the remorseful protest of his better self! But Jesus showed no sign, and with the same gracious thoroughness, He dried those feet upon the towel. Not until He came to Simon Peter was the silence broken. Then the impetuous son of Jonas could no longer contain himself, and I loved him for it, often as we had failed to see eye to eye.

"Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" he cried, and there was a tremor in his voice.

"What I do thou knowest not now," Jesus answered quietly, "but thou shalt know hereafter."

"Thou shalt never wash my feet!"

Jesus looked up with that smile we knew so well, half-whimsical, half-sad. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

"No part with Thee?" Peter exclaimed. "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

The Lord was speaking to us all when He said, a moment later, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. And ye are clean, but . . ." His eyes passed over the group until they rested on the face of Judas; then Jesus added in measured tones, "but not all."

Replacing the vessels in a corner of the room, the Master resumed His robes, and sat down again at the table.

"Know ye what I have done to you?" He enquired, tenderly. "Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither is he that is sent greater than He that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

We looked into that face, so calm and benignant. His words cut like whips of steel and yet, strangely enough, healed as they fell. Was there ever such a Master! It was a chastened and subdued company now encircling Him, its diversities and differences wondrously blended by that divine presence in the midst. A new reverence, a deeper love for Him, filled our souls. And when He said, "With desire I have desired to

eat this Passover with you before I suffer," the words, although we did not fathom their full meaning, stirred a responsiveness we had never experienced before. Many a time had we observed the Feast; never had we been moved like this. We were carried back in thought to that dread night which the celebration commemorated. We seemed to live through its terrors. The lamb had been slain, and its blood sprinkled on the lintel and sideposts of the door. The Angel of Vengeance swept noiselessly through the land, taking his inexorable toll of the oppressors' first-born from their unhallowed homes, while with loins girded and feet shod, awaiting the summons of God's servant, our fathers partook hastily of the roasted flesh, the unleavened bread, and then the wine-cup passed from hand to hand.

Our observance of the Passover followed the customary form, when suddenly a new significance broke on our minds as Jesus spoke. Taking the circular wafer, He broke it into fragments and handed it to us, saying, "This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me."

His body—broken like that unleavened bread, and given for us? We ate in silent awe, wondering what it could mean. Yet even had any one had the temerity to ask, he would have scarcely have had time to frame the question, for again

the Master spoke. Taking the cup of wine, He first offered thanks, and then said, "Drink ye all of it, for this is My blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

John, I feel sure, understood something of what the Saviour meant, for he once told me how, the first time he saw Jesus down by Jordan's banks, the Baptist had said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The lamb of the first Passover had meant security through sacrifice. Was it, then, a symbol of this divine Master with whom we had lived for nearly three years? I was linking up these things in my mind when my blood began to run cold at what the Lord was saying: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me."

It was like a bolt from the blue. We knew there was a possibility that danger lurked without. The animosity of the priests might well prompt them to vent their spleen on Him, but which of us, though admittedly we had often complained and distrusted His judgment, had given Him cause to doubt his personal loyalty? Simon Peter's face was ablaze. He signalled to John, who was next to Christ, to ask who it was. Jesus whispered that He would indicate the traitor, but He did it in such a characteristic way that none of us understood. For, as you probably are aware, when a host desired to show some signal

honour to one of his guests, he would take a morsel of food from the dish, and offer it to him with his own hand. This is what Jesus did. The man of Kerioth took it without showing any concern, and his secret remained unknown. Had it been grasped then, I do not think Judas would have left that room alive. Some of my associates were men of the outdoors. Peter, too, was not only one of hot temper, but in his younger days had been prone to let violence give weight to his arguments. But the observance proper having come to an end, the Master said to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly," and he instantly rose and left the room. We supposed that it was some errand on which the Master wished him to go, but, nevertheless, we all seemed to breathe more freely after he had left. It was as though a cloud which had obscured the warmth and light of the sun had passed away.

Even the Master seemed conscious of it, for He began to speak again, and a note of exultation was in His voice. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. . . . Yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me, and, as I said unto the Jews, whither I go, ye cannot come. . . . A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." He divined that we were not on the best of terms with each

other, but Peter's mind was busy with the intelligence that the Master was about to leave us.

"Lord, whither goest Thou?" he demanded. If there were danger of betrayal, Peter did not intend to let the Master run any unnecessary risks.

"Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards."

Still persistent, he pressed the matter. "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake."

Bravely said, and at that moment, he meant it; we all felt the same.

"Wilt Thou lay down thy life for My sake?" Jesus was revealing to Peter, yea, and to us all, the need of divine grace. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. . . . Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

If ever compassion were stirred for others in their need, it was there, surging in the soul of our Redeemer that night. As He looked at the perplexed and saddened faces around Him, He went on to say, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for

you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."

It was I who interrupted Him, for I confess such words were beyond me. Either He had omitted to tell us where He was going, or else I had missed it. "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by Me."

It was rather gratifying to note that I was not the only one mystified by such strange words, for Philip intervened. "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works."

At first, some of us at any rate thought that Jesus intended to go forth to some secret place where He might remain in security until the danger of betrayal had passed, and the anger of the priests had abated. We perceived now, however, that whatever His meaning might be, it was

not that. There was something deeper, greater, higher, than our dim minds could discern. But though we did not take in the full import of His words just then, the memory of them abides. He told of the Comforter who was to come to us—the Spirit of truth who was henceforth to be our guide and confidence—and then with further desire to make strong our souls, He said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

The concluding part of the Hallel having been sung, we followed our divine Lord to the door. He stood for a moment on the threshold, the moonlight gleaming about His head and forming, it appeared to me, a halo upon His brow. But He knew naught of that. He had caught sight of a figure in the shadow. It was the good man of the house, whose hospitality we had enjoyed, and the Master would not leave without a word of farewell and of grateful appreciation for his generous thought. The night was still. Now and then the distant bark of a dog rent the silence, while from various parts of the city, lights twinkled from many a casement. Any fear of betrayal seemed childish, if not absurd. And we walked between the close-set houses, through the gate, and out towards Olivet.

As we went on, Jesus in that marvellous

analogy of the vine and the branches showed us that only in vital relationship with Him could we ever fulfil the Father's purpose that we should bear much fruit. And for the first time I realised that faith was not mere intellectual assent to certain truths; it was a life to be lived in Christ, the proof of which was its fruit. Then He spoke of the honour which He had made ours. We were not servants, but friends; and though as His friends, our loyalty might prove costly, and our poor love be tried in the fires of persecution, we need not be dismayed. The mighty vindication of God's Anointed would yet be manifest. "These things have I spoken to you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Truly, I listened in amazement. These were not the words of One who went in fear of His life. And I could not satisfactorily adjust them to that betrayal of which He had spoken a little while before, nor to our long absence from the Temple throngs. But now, as when our father David swept with master-hand the strings of his harp, weaving apparent discords into one rapturous harmony, the Lord Christ suddenly broke forth into a noble prayer of thanksgiving which gripped us fast, and touched my heart as nothing in my life had ever done before. He

stood with uplifted hands, His face transfigured with supernal light, His voice vibrant with exultant praise. And we listened entranced.

“Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. . . .”

I ventured to glance at Peter, thinking of his ascription of divine Sonship to our Master at Caesarea Philippi, but his face was deep in the shadows. I thought again of Christ's Messianic entry into the Holy City, and felt assured now that this was indeed the long-awaited One for whom our nation had prayed. And so I lost, for a few moments, what He was saying. But as I listened again, I found that we were the burden of His petitions.

“They have believed that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me. . . . Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those

whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are. . . . I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one . . . that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The voice ceased. Only the gurgling waters of Kidron flowing at our feet were heard. Then the Master leading, we crossed the brook, traversed the wooded slopes a little way, and entered the garden called Gethsemane. This was a favourite spot of Jesus. He had sometimes come thither after an exhausting day of teaching in Jerusalem, though I was rather at a loss to know why He thus sought it at such an hour. His purpose was soon, however, made clear.

He was ever solicitous for our good; He desired us to rest. "Sit ye here," He said, "while I go and pray yonder."

We were all about to settle ourselves beneath the trees when He indicated that He wished Peter and the sons of Zebedee to accompany Him a little farther. They told me afterwards how His face was filled with pain as He said:

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry ye here, and watch with Me."

They saw Him withdraw to a place where a boulder, like the rock-hewn altar on which Abraham purposed to sacrifice his son, rose from the soil. There He knelt. The moonlight, making a pattern of fretted silver through the trees, illumined His uplifted face. And He prayed:

“O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”

That was all the three heard. They were weary, and the breeze whispering through the leaves lulled them to sleep. Peter awoke to find Christ standing by his side, and after his avowed willingness to lay down his life for the Master's sake, he felt keenly that Christ's words were well justified:

“What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

A second time Jesus returned; they were fast asleep. It was from the youth, John Mark, who had followed us to the garden that I learned how the Master had agonised there. He had prayed again, “O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done.” His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, and an angel ministered unto Him.

After the third time, Jesus came to the three, saying, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hand of sinners. Rise, let us be going. Behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me."

They were on their feet at once, as indeed were we all. We could see lights flashing through the trees, and heard the shuffling of feet through the undergrowth. Then as though at a given signal, the sounds ceased, and a single figure detached itself from the rest and came towards us. It was Judas, the accursed member of our company!

"Hail, Master!" he said, in unctuous tones, and kissed Jesus on the cheek.

"Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

There was no time for further words. We were surrounded. Through brake and bramble burst a number of men. There were some of the priests and elders, a few in the uniform of the Temple guard, and some rough fellows, armed with cudgels. One of the guards stepping up to effect the arrest, grasped Jesus by the arm. Peter had stood as much as one of his nature could, and seeing his Master thus in danger of violence, he rushed forwards. Out leapt a short sword from its scabbard,—I did not even know he had a weapon. He dealt a blow at the soldier which would have cloven his skull had he not swiftly

jumped aside. As it was, his ear was almost severed. Amid the angry shouts which broke out we heard Jesus saying, "Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? . . . Suffer ye thus far." And placing His hand on the man's ear, He healed him.

The Master faced the Priests. "Whom seek ye?" He waited with quiet courage for some one to answer.

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I am He. Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves to take Me? I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness. I have told you that I am He. If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way."

The guards closed in on Him. They bound His wrists, and led Him away. And we? . . . God forgive us, we ran for our lives!

I know not whither the others went. It was every man for himself! Before I knew what I was doing, I was speeding away to Bethany, intent on bearing the ill tidings to Lazarus and his faithful sisters. The house was quiet as the tomb when I reached it, and my hand uplifted to beat upon the door was suddenly restrained. What

could they do? What was there to be done? Nothing!

Sick at heart, I crept like a guilty thing from their door. I could not have looked into those faces and admitted that we had done naught to save Him from His foes! We had failed Him! That Master and Lord, who had lavished His love upon us, surely deserved better at our hands, and in spite of all our professed loyalty, when the hour of testing came, we had proved faithless! God be merciful!

VII

FRIDAY—A DAY OF TRAGEDY

*"And didst Thou love the race that loved not Thee,
And didst Thou take to heaven a human brow?
Dost plead with man's voice by the marvellous sea?
Art Thou his kinsman now?"*

*"O God, O kinsman loved, but not enough!
O man, with eyes majestic after death,
Whose feet have toiled along our pathways rough,
Whose lips drawn human breath!"*

*"By that one likeness which is ours and Thine,
By that one nature which doth hold us kin,
By that high heaven where, sinless, Thou dost shine,
To draw us sinners in;"*

*"By Thy last silence in the judgment-hall,
By long foreknowledge of the deadly tree,
By darkness, by the wormwood and the gall,
I pray Thee visit me."*

*"Come, lest this heart should, cold and cast away,
Die ere the guest adored she entertain—
Lest eyes which never saw Thine earthly day
Should miss Thy heavenly reign."*

JEAN INGELow.

THE FRIDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF TRAGEDY

THAT blow of Peter, which had almost severed the ear of Malchus, was fortunate in one respect. At least, I should say, the healing which followed it was; for while it was a long time before the soldier forgave Peter for that savage onslaught, he was moved with admiration for our Master. And it was from Malchus that I got some of the facts enabling me to write the story of the hours following the arrest. Jesus was taken at once to Annas. Although it was past midnight, the unscrupulous dignitary, detested as he was feared, had given orders that the Prisoner was first to be arraigned before him. The whole proceeding was illegal. For one thing, no trial on a capital charge could be brought against any man between the hours of sunset and sunrise; for another, Annas had no official standing whatever. But that did not deter him. As Jesus was led in, still bound, the countenance of Annas showed considerable animation. He had never seen this Prophet of Nazareth before, and he was curious to know what kind of man it was who had set Jerusalem in a ferment, and defied

the authority of the priests. But he was disappointed. There was nothing of the firebrand nor of the insolent demagogue about Him, and the task of securing a sentence of death was not going to be an easy one. Further, although he had received various reports from his emissaries, none had brought any reliable information on which to found a satisfactory case to present either to the Sanhedrin or to Pilate. And it was necessary to get a full condemnation from both if the desired issue were to be reached. He proceeded, therefore, to examine the Prisoner in the hope of securing some incriminating statement from His own lips, which could later be turned against Him.

Annas was proceeding to question Jesus at some length regarding both His disciples and His doctrine, when he met with a further surprise. Far from being over-awed by His interlocutor, Jesus met him with a firmness that few ever showed to Annas.

"I spake openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me what I have said unto them. Behold, they know what I said."

If a soft answer turneth away wrath, a decisive reprimand like this would not allay it. There

was a deeper meaning in Christ's words than is apparent at first. But Annas perceived it. A bright spot glowed on either cheek, and he clutched the arms of his chair convulsively. Taking his cue from the ex-High Priest, and assured that he would find favour by showing his zeal, one of the Temple officers struck the Prisoner a violent blow with his open hand.

"Answerest Thou the High Priest so?" he demanded.

This piece of wanton savagery was unexpected, and Jesus stepped back involuntarily. Then He asked in clear tones, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?"

It revealed to Annas what he had not suspected before. Jesus was more familiar with the law's requirements than His enemies had supposed a Peasant could be, and He was calling into question not only the methods being employed, but also the legality of even questioning Him in that way. The Jewish code governing a trial on a serious charge was most explicit. It laid down the principle that the witnesses for the defence must be heard before any evidence was submitted by the prosecution. Moreover, only the Sanhedrin under the High Priest's presidency, and duly convened after daybreak, could hear such cases. Annas had, therefore, not the slightest warrant

for this examination of Jesus. But the whole proceeding was as futile as it was illegal. Neither threats of violence nor the stern admonitions of Annas produced any effect. And he began to see that to convict the Prisoner would require all the astuteness his party could command. After a whispered colloquy with his henchmen, he gave instructions to take Jesus at once to Caiaphas, where the Sanhedrin was already in session waiting to begin the trial.

In the courtyard between the two houses, a knot of attendants and some of the guards clustered about a brazier. The night was cold, and their day had been long. Yet their duties would not terminate until Annas gave the word. Time dragged on. But some diversion was provided by the portress. She had admitted John of Zebedee. Although he had not been there for a considerable time, she remembered him well as one who had frequently had business with the steward of the household. She was not so sure, however, of the man who accompanied him on this occasion. As soon as she could leave her post, she went in search of the stranger. Peter with characteristic independence, had thrust himself into danger in spite of John's remonstrances. Although he had fled like the rest, his pride, if not his outraged loyalty, prompted him to see matters through. Whether he had some half-formed idea of rescu-

ing the Master from His foes, I never heard. Suffice it to say, there he was with the men around the fire. His attempts to engage them in conversation had been in vain; his guarded questions about what was taking place at such a late hour in the house of Annas, were coldly repulsed. And sitting there, moodily looking into the coals, the portress found him.

"Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." It was only a bow drawn at a venture, and she expected only playful banter in return. But she was not prepared for the vehemence of his retort. "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest."

A ripple of interest ran through the little circle. But even when eventually it died away, the mischievous girl felt there might be more amusement to be gained from the incident, and laughing gaily, she prompted a fellow-servant to make a further attempt to bait the stranger. Sauntering up to the fire, the other looked steadily at Peter as though striving to recall his face. "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth."

With an oath, Simon Peter sprang to his feet. "I know not the Man," he flamed up.

The onlookers were now curious. At first they had thought there might not be anything in what the girls had said, but the heat which their accusations had generated certainly indicated that there was.

"Of a truth he also was with Him, for he is a Galilaean," one asserted, taking his cue from Peter's garb which was characteristic of the north.

"Thy speech betrayeth thee," declared another.

A kinsman of the wounded Malchus spoke up. "Did I not see thee with Him in the garden?"

This was too much for Peter. Discerning the trap set for his feet, he began to curse and to swear. "Man, I know not what thou sayest!" he hurled at the last speaker.

At that very moment, the shrill voice of a cock was heard. But only Simon Peter noticed it. There was a burst of light across the courtyard as the doors of Annas were flung open. The Prisoner, still bound, was being conducted by the guard to the court of Caiaphas. As Jesus passed the men by the fire, His eyes met those of His faithless disciple. And recalling how the Lord had told him that before the cock-crow he would deny Him thrice, Peter, with breaking heart and tear-drenched face, went forth into the night, unmolested save by the accusing voice of conscience. He had disowned his Lord, in spite of both protestations and warnings, and—Christ knew it!

The Sanhedrin, as I have said, was not legally assembled. Not only was it not yet sunrise, but also being a Feast day, it was expressly forbidden to meet on a day thus set apart. Yet mere irregu-

larities of that kind could not be permitted to stand in the way when One like this lay in the power of the priests. Besides, with the city full of possible sympathisers, every hour was of the utmost importance. Let His condemnation be secured from the Sanhedrin, and ratified by the Procurator, and the fact of the pilgrims being at hand might even be turned to advantage. It would the better serve to restore the prestige of the rulers, and by showing how swiftly retribution had fallen on Jesus, would minimise the mischief they felt He had wrought.

The Sanhedrin sat in what was called the Hall of Hewn Stone. Caiaphas presided, and it was plain from the beginning of the proceedings that he intended to press the case to a speedy conclusion. Unfortunately for him, his trusted helpers had not had sufficient time to prepare the evidence fully. Judas had rather precipitated matters. It is true that witnesses had been procured, but either they had not been prompted what to say or, unaccustomed as they were to face the august assembly of the elders, they were too confused to remember their instructions. The necessary corroboration was not forthcoming, and this was fatal to Caiaphas's plans. There was still a division of opinion in the Council. That was not due to any friendliness towards Jesus; Nicodemus and those who favoured the Master had not been sum-

moned to this meeting. But there were some who had grave doubts about playing with edged tools, and they were perturbed about their own safety. The High Priest strove, therefore, to secure unanimity at all costs.

Witness after witness contradicted himself or the testimony of others, and Caiaphas, although to all appearances judicially calm, was inwardly growing furious. Were they to lose their prey when it was within reach of their claws? Were all the schemings of months past to prove ineffectual? Everything pointed that way when the proceedings took a new turn. Two witnesses came forward who told substantially the same story.

"This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days,' " said one.

"We have heard Him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another, made without hands,' " averred the second.

Jesus deigned no reply.

"Answerest Thou nothing?" cried Caiaphas. "What is it which these witness against Thee?"

The High Priest was no fool. He felt that the citadel of silence in which Jesus stood must be taken at all hazards. He was also sufficiently well informed, as were many of his compatriots on the Council, to know that when Jesus spoke in

those terms He was referring specifically to His body. But the majority construed these statements as a threatened attack on the Sanctuary. Abandoning the impartiality which his position required, Caiaphas said:

“Full well, my brethren, do ye know what such an assault would mean. This Galilaean plans to inflame the ignorant who have acclaimed Him as the Messiah. Were we to ask Him regarding that unseemly uproar within the very shadow of the Temple, He would declare that He is not responsible for the people’s folly! But were we to enquire what was His attitude when He was commanded to rebuke their senseless outcries, there are those present even of our own number, who could testify plainly that He not only declined to do so, but that He even defied them. Let Him head an attack on the House of God, and what would happen? There would be tumult and bloodshed. Naturally, the true-hearted would rally to the defence of their most sacred possession. The Temple Courts would run with blood—with Jewish blood! The tyrannical power of Pontius Pilate would be utilised to crush us; it would please his base soul to have an excuse thus to avenge himself for the complaints we have had just cause to make against his iniquitous misrule.”

Caiaphas exulted at the impression he was

making. He could see some who had been apathetic now following his words with the closest attention. But he had yet to play his master-stroke. He turned confidently to Jesus, who still stood silent through this harangue.

"I adjure Thee, by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God," he cried, his voice harsh with passion. This was the consummation to which Caiaphas had been working. He was sagacious, and cleverly had he placed Jesus in a position where He must speak and so commit Himself, or keeping silence condemn Himself as a deceiver.

"Thou hast said," He replied. "Nevertheless, I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

This was more than Caiaphas in his most sanguine moments, could have hoped for. But he concealed his feelings so well that none suspected the satisfaction he felt. With well-simulated horror, he rent his robes, crying, "He hath spoken blasphemy. What think ye?" Solemnly, bearded faces turned to each other. There was a hum of conversation for a moment or two. Then they gave their verdict: "He is guilty of death."

Never were the words of our Scriptures—"Rend your hearts and not your garments"—more to the point. Looking back on what was

related to me, my heart sickens at the thought of that night. Flouting the requirements of the Law, these professed leaders of the people, passed from one illegality to another. The most disgusting brutality followed their sentence of death. It may have been due to a feeling of irritation that, although they had condemned this Man to death, they were powerless to carry out their sentence. The sanction of Rome must first be obtained. But that did not prevent them venting their spite on the Prisoner. The guards spat in His face. Then blindfolding Him, they smote Him with their hands, bidding Him guess who had struck Him. "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ. Who is he that smote Thee?"

Day was at hand, and if their object were to be gained, and the case concluded before the populace was about, the utmost expedition was necessary. Word had already been sent to Pilate that the Elders required to submit an important case for hearing. So still bound, and with the filthy evidence of their maltreatment upon Him, Jesus was led by the priests to Pilate's court. But as it was the preparation for the Feast, they would not go into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled. Think of it, my friends! As if anything could further defile men who had been guilty of such base injustice! Pilate had therefore to come forth to the terraced walk overlooking the court-

yard to hear their complaints. He was not in the best of humours, said my informant. It was his business as Governor to know what took place in Jerusalem, and although he would be ignorant of how precisely the capture had been effected, he was fully conversant with the week's events.

"What accusation bring ye against this Man?" demanded Pilate. His scowling face betokened that the Jews could expect little favour from him.

With ill-concealed insolence, they replied, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee."

"Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law." There was a sneer behind the words, and they knew it. Pilate turned on his heel as though he had disposed of the matter.

The elders therefore cried, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." The secret was out! So they had already tried Jesus, and finding Him guilty, sought Pilate's aid simply to put Him out of their way? What did they think—that he was merely a tool of their prejudice and passion? They saw that he viewed the case as one involving the Jewish law, and that he was not disposed to try it. So they commenced to lie openly in their accusations.

"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a king."

Pilate looked from them to the Man before him. Stoic as he was, there was something about the calm self-command of Jesus which appealed to him. Leaving the accusers to their own devices, he ordered his guard to bring Jesus into the judgment hall, that he might question Him. An amused smile flickered round the hard mouth of the Governor as he looked at the Prisoner.

“Art Thou the King of the Jews?” Pilate saw the grim humour of the charge, and was determined, if possible, to score over his antagonists by treating the case with ridicule.

“Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?”

Pilate blazed up instantly. His leniency was not to be misinterpreted, and he was not to be questioned by the Man he was trying. “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?”

With quiet dignity, Jesus replied. “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now is My kingdom not from hence.”

Pilate’s opinion seemed confirmed. This was some poor, misguided fellow who either imagined He was entitled to regal honours, or else was possibly descended from some past ruler of Israel.

Certainly, there was nothing about Him for Rome to treat seriously.

"Art Thou a king then?" he queried, still musing over his growing conviction.

"Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked sarcastically, but with the object of closing the conversation. He had reached the conclusion he sought, and going forth to the Jews, the crowd now increased by the advent of a number of supporters who had been beaten up, he said with emphasis: "I find in Him no fault at all!"

The elders listened incredulously. Did it mean that the Governor was about to dismiss the case? They must act with promptitude. Their ferocity was like that of a beast robbed of its prey. They began denouncing Jesus with increasing virulence.

"He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jerusalem, beginning from Galilee to this place."

An interesting fact here emerged. Ascertaining that our Lord belonged to Galilee, Pilate saw a means of ridding himself of what threatened to become an annoyance. Galilee belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, and as the Tetrarch hap-

pened to be in Jerusalem, Pilate determined to remit the case to him. There was also another reason. You may know that not only had Pilate usurped Herod's power, but he also occupied the royal palace. Consequently, the two had been at enmity for a long time, and so by thrusting this matter upon him, the Governor would have the satisfaction of irritating his enemy!

The fourth stage of the trial took place before the Tetrarch. But instead of being angered by this proceeding, as Pilate intended, he took it as a compliment. The Procurator evidently wished to admit his rights. Moreover, Herod had heard so much about Jesus, that he welcomed the chance of seeing Him and perhaps persuading Him, like an itinerant magician, to work some miracles for his edification. But Jesus was as deaf to Herod's repeated requests as He was to the vehement charges put forth by the priests against Him. At length, perceiving that nothing of interest was forthcoming, he allowed his bodyguard to array the Galilaean in the festal robe of an aspirant, and when they had made sport of Him for a time, Herod sent Him back to Pilate. His messenger, first thanking the Procurator for his courtesy, and assuring him that bygones were bygones, explained that the opinion of his royal master coincided with that of the illustrious representative of Rome—he found no fault in the Man!

Pilate had not reckoned on this turn of events. His plans were completely frustrated. But, at least, his desire to release Jesus was in conformity with Herod's verdict. The elders could hardly refuse to accept the considered opinion of one who belonged to their own faith. So calling them together again, Pilate gave the signal for silence.

"Ye have brought this Man unto me, as One that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him. Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the Passover. Will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

The crowd had been primed and it cried, "Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas!"

Pilate could hardly believe his ears. Now Barabbas, whom I once saw, was a fellow of villainous looks, and his life was in keeping with them. He had been the terror of the countryside. Murder and insurrection were among the crimes of which he was guilty, and folk had heaved a sigh of relief when they heard he was safely un-

der lock and key. This request for his release proved now beyond the shadow of a doubt that only their abominable spite had moved the priests to bring this charge against Jesus. The Governor resolved that he would not play into their hands. His brain, they say, worked swiftly when he was in a dilemma, and he rapidly thought out some means of outwitting his opponents. Handing Jesus over to the officer of the guard, he gave orders that He should be scourged.

Had you ever witnessed such a spectacle, as I did on a previous occasion, you would pray God that you might never look on the like again. Jesus, stripped to the waist, was fastened to the scourging pillar. There was a ring high up in the masonry to which His hands were tied. Then the brawny executioner plied the scourge. Its thongs were loaded with pieces of metal, and every blow brought blood. The prescribed number of strokes having been given, the soldiers, entering into the spirit of things, let their coarse wit have rein. They had heard the charge brought by the Jews. This Man had posed as a king, so they would render Him due honour. It was not that they had anything against Him personally, but He belonged to a race they both despised and detested, and—there were some old scores to pay. A king must have a suitable robe. An old toga was unearthed, and flung over His lacerated back.

The crown presented more difficulty. But with fiendish ingenuity, one pulled out a branch of spiked bramble from the heap of fuel in the kitchen. This he deftly wove into a circlet, and with a grin at his cleverness, pressed it down upon the Lord's brow. A third pushed a reed into His bound hands for a sceptre. And there stood the King fitly arrayed! With ribald laughter they viewed their handiwork.

"Hail, King of the Jews," they cried. Then with mock solemnity they bowed before Him. They spat in His face and buffeted Him about the head till the thorns pierced His brow, and caused the blood to trickle down that sacred face.

Through the parted hangings, Pilate who had been formulating a plan, caught sight of the rough horseplay, and the pathetic form in the midst. An idea occurred to him. Signalling the centurion to bring Jesus just as He was, Pilate first went out again to the Pavement, and leaning over the balustrade, addressed the mob.

"Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him."

Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, "Behold the Man!"

An incident occurred at this juncture which made Pilate's course even more difficult. An attendant appeared, bearing a message to the Gov-

error from Procula, his wife. She was a woman of noble birth and still nobler spirit. I have seen her being borne in her palanquin through the streets and next to Miriam, my beloved, I never beheld a kindlier face. Pilate had many faults, but one quality I always admired in him. It was said by those at court that he was passionately devoted to his wife, as, indeed, she was to him, having left her home in Italy to share the exile his duties compelled.

As he opened the roll, the brow of the Governor clouded.

"Have thou nothing to do with that just Man," he read, "for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

Did she know intuitively that Jesus was the innocent prey of His accusers? Yet she could scarcely understand that were the verdict to be given in His favour, it might mean for Pilate that recall which would spell ruin for his ambitious career. While he turned her message over in his mind he was sternly summoned back to reality. One voice more strident than the rest was heard above the tumult.

"We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

"If thou let this Man go," yelled another, "thou art not Caesar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar."

New factors in the trial had thus been introduced. Coupled with the urgent message of Procula, all Pilate's superstitious fears were aroused. What if this were some divine Being thus arraigned at his bar? But almost as grave, that last shout conveyed a veiled threat which would assuredly bring down on him the stern reprimand of Rome. Was ever a man in such a strait?

Again he took Jesus apart. "Whence art Thou?" he asked.

There was some strange quality about this Prisoner which he could not exactly define. Such patient endurance and superb mastery of Himself, in spite of the rough handling He had received, kindled Pilate's admiration. But he was nevertheless incensed by the Man's evident unwillingness to save Himself.

"Speakest Thou not unto me?" the Governor stormed. "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify, and have power to release Thee?"

"Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin."

The Procurator stood at the parting of the ways. Plainly, so I reason, he saw that not a single charge preferred against Jesus rendered Him worthy of death. Yet, on the other hand, to

fly in the face of Jewish intrigue meant more than he was prepared to risk. What should he do? Clamouring for its rights, the crowd had sought the release of Barabbas. There might still be a way out in that direction. Accordingly, Pilate gave his instructions. The vile fellow was brought up from the dungeons. Clad only in a loin-cloth, and fettered hand and foot, he was led to the Pavement. Then Jesus, our peerless Lord, was placed alongside this notorious criminal. The contrast was tremendous. The deep-set eyes of Barabbas scanned the crowd, and then turned to the face of his judge. What jest was this? Had the Governor brought him there to be the laughing-stock of this mob? His hands were clenched in impotent wrath. Then he tugged at his chains as though to break them. And Jesus, on whose face the blood had congealed in horrible streaks, stood with a majesty which was divine, awaiting the people's choice.

Above the babel, Pilate asked again, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" If he thought that his cleverness in bringing the two thus together could atone for his lack of moral courage, he was quickly undeceived.

With one consent rose the shout, "Barabbas!"

"What will ye then that I shall do unto Him whom ye call King of the Jews?"

"Crucify Him," they cried angrily.

In vain he tried to stem the tide of passion his indecision had set flowing. "Why, what evil hath He done?" he weakly asked, looking over the faces before him to where the priests were ranged, as though hoping against hope that they would relent.

The cry surged upwards again, "Crucify Him! Away with Him!"

Pilate stood for a moment, unable to decide what to do next. Then he stretched out his hand towards Jesus. "Behold your King! Shall I crucify your King?"

From the back of the mob came the words, "We have no king but Caesar!" It was the priests who spake.

The die was cast! Pilate had paltered with right and wrong. He had postponed the decision, until at last it was made for him by force of circumstances. All his intentions to release the Prisoner were as nought. And even though it meant allowing the Jews to gloat over the victory they had wrested from him, he was powerless—or so, methinks, he argued. Calling for water, he washed his hands before the multitude. And though he knew the words were false even as he uttered them, he said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. See ye to it!"

"His blood be on us and on our children," came the instant reply.

"Innocent?" Forgive the heat with which I write. Pilate released one whose life had been spent in violence, whose guilt all knew and whose condemnation was well merited. He delivered to the death of the cross One whose love had been given to men, irrespective of race or worth. His trial had been a travesty of justice; the charges against Him the Governor had not troubled to investigate according to the laws of evidence. Could then that ghastly make-believe of washing his hands render him innocent of such appalling injustice? Nay, in sentencing Jesus, Pilate wrote the doom of his own soul in indelible characters. And he delivered Jesus to be crucified!

An unwelcome figure pushed its way into the presence of the chief priests and elders. It was Judas. Seeing the results of his perfidy, he was consumed with remorse. So he brought back the silver for which he had sold his Lord. "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood," he blurted out. Great drops of perspiration stood on his brow. His eyes were almost starting from their sockets, as he confronted them.

They laughed in his face. "What is that to us? See thou to that!" was the callous reply.

Flinging the money at their feet, he went out to self-destruction.

It was nearly nine in the morning when Jesus was eventually led forth from the Praetorium. I saw Him, the divine Master who had done so much for us. They had hoisted a rough cross on His shoulders, and within the cordon of enridged spears, I beheld Him staggering beneath the weight of the beams. People were only just beginning to walk the streets. They looked on amazed, aghast, at the motley crowd surging round the guards, and uttering ribald cries. Other faces appeared at the casements. While on all sides were heard conflicting voices—some sarcastic, some sympathetic,—as the party moved in the direction of the walls.

Just beyond the gates, there was a sudden halt. Christ had fallen under His load. I was not surprised. He had not slept since the night of Wednesday, nor had He eaten aught save the Paschal Meal the previous evening. Added to that, the anguish of the Garden, the mental torture of those protracted trials, and the loss of blood due to the ill-treatment He had received, and none could wonder at His exhaustion. My first impulse was to force my way through the throng, and lift that cross from His prostrate form. What kept me back? What evil thing made me hesitate? God forgive my cowardice and shameful disloyalty! Even while I waited, a swarthy stranger, Simon, the Cyrenian, whom I

afterwards learned to love as a brother, was impressed for service.

A number of women were standing on a small eminence as the procession passed. Their hearts were melted by the sight, and their voices rose in lamentation.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me,” said Jesus, turning His compassionate gaze upon them, “but weep for yourselves and for your children . . . for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

One of these gentle-hearted women, and methinks the noblest of them all, stepped forward at this point. Her name was Veronica. Taking her kerchief from her shoulders, she proffered it to the Master, bidding Him wipe the bloodstains from His sacred face. He took it from her with a word of deep gratitude, not so much for the kindly service she would render, but for the generous spirit which had moved her to brave censure and possible opposition from His guards. Then using it as she had suggested, He gave it back to her. It was afterwards rumoured, although I give the story little credence, that imprinted on the piece of linen was the clear outline of the Saviour’s face. I relate the incident merely to show that, in spite of the horrible cruelty which was in the ascendant that day, there were some of our nation to whom Jesus was dear, and who

would fain have saved Him from the terrible fate to which His enemies hurried Him.

At last, Golgotha! I dared not go too near to that dread circle of spear-heads, encrimsoned by the sun till they looked like a ring of blood. But it was no longer fear, but bitter shame which kept me afar. Certain good women of Jerusalem, who always provided a potion for the unfortunates sentenced to crucifixion, had sent the customary draught. It was a mixture of wine and myrrh, intended to numb the senses of the sufferers, so that the acute pangs might be somewhat dulled. This cup was proffered to the two malefactors, who drank greedily of it. But with that superb courage which I had so often witnessed before, Jesus declined to touch it. His was the suffering of the Just for the unjust, and love would escape no pain if, by so doing, it could plumb the deepest depths of self-sacrifice. I knew instinctively that He was dying for us all. The words of the preceding night came back with tragic clearness to my reeling brain, "My blood . . . which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Though I put my hands to my ears, the dull blows of the hammer, driving home the awful nails, could be heard. And as though fiendish hate could not but go to the fullest extent, they crucified our peerless Master between the two thieves. The truths my old rabbi taught us with

such diligence were charged with new significance, as I shuddered on Calvary's brow. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. . . . He was numbered with the transgressors."

The crosses were upreared in the holes dug for them, the ground pressed firmly about the base of each, and the work of the soldiers had come to an end. Only a quarternion remained under the command of an officer to see that, on the part of the victims' friends, no attempt were made at rescue; on the part of their foes, that their jests and taunts did not lead to rioting.

Impelled by some vague promptings, I drew nearer to the crowd round about the central cross, though I took the precaution of pulling my head-dress well over my face. And there, helpless and heartbroken, I looked on. The soldiers were sitting together, gambling for Christ's garments. The mob circling round, with tireless persistence hurled cruel jeers and maledictions at my stricken Master.

"Ah, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself, and come down from the cross." This was from some who had testified against Him.

"If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross," urged others.

More terrible still, it seemed to me, were the mocking words of the chief priests and scribes, who, although they had feared defilement in Pilate's hall, saw nothing amiss in being there to witness the completion of their foul schemes.

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save," said they to the bystanders. Then pointing to Jesus, they cried, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

But His prayer had been, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." And naught could turn His love to bitterness, not even the scoffing, spitting crowd of His persecutors.

Perhaps the most terrible of all was the wrathful scorn of one of the malefactors. As he writhed in agony, trying vainly to wrench his limbs free from the grip of the nails, he called out, savagely, "If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us."

A voice answered from the far side. It was his companion in crime. "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done nothing amiss." Then, in penitent and subdued tones,

he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

The sacred head was turned with an effort in his direction. The well-loved voice replied, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

With leaden feet the hours dragged on. It was nearly midday when the clouds began to roll up, and the rumble of distant thunder in the hills betokened an approaching storm. The crowd visibly thinned, for the spectacle had already begun to pall. And then some whom I recognised drew nigh to the cross. There was my friend John of Zebedee; he was supporting a woman bowed with inconsolable grief. I could not see her face until eventually she looked up at Jesus. It was His mother! With her were Salome, Mary of Cleopas, and the Magdalene. She flung up her hands in anguished supplication towards Him, and then sank with a piercing cry into John's arms. Christ's eyes were closed in pain, but the sound of her voice aroused Him. He smiled wanly, yet happily, methinks, to see the two who were dearest to Him on earth standing together at His feet.

"Woman, behold thy son," He said gently. Then to John, He added, "Behold thy mother!"

Darkness appalling in its density, slowly overspread the sky. It lasted for three hours, as

though the sun in heaven could no longer look upon human ingratitude so vile and divine sorrow so tragic. Yea, I found myself thinking that man, having thrust from him the Light of the world, and loving darkness rather than light because his deeds were evil, had been given the portion he had chosen. As I have said, for three seemingly interminable hours, black horror enclosed us, innocent and guilty alike. Jesus had hung there for six hours. And then the "despised and rejected of men," identified with the lost in His atoning love, uttered that cry which pierced me to the very soul, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

One of the soldiers, a rough, upstanding fellow, but one withal with a heart of gold, took the sponge-stopper from his flask, and pouring some wine on it, lifted it to moisten the Master's lips. It was a generous act—may God reward him! Then the sacred face was flooded with light for a moment, as in tones ringing with triumph Christ exclaimed, "It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit!"

For a time, it seemed as though all the furies of Nature were unleashed. Thunders rolled incessantly. The lightning drew its flaming sword and clove the dark-hung heavens with its blade. The earth rocked beneath our feet. And, panic-stricken, the last spectators of that colossal

tragedy fled from the scene, all except a tiny group. His mother and her friends remained faithful to the end, with a loyalty beautiful to behold. Besides them, there were only the soldiers, John and myself, with perhaps one or two more. The centurion at last spoke. "Truly this was the Son of God." And my heart was fain to cry, "and the Saviour of the world." A messenger who arrived at that moment with orders for the officer in charge of the executions also brought tidings that the veil of the Temple, which separated the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary proper, had been rent in twain from top to bottom. Did this imply that, henceforth, through Christ's redemptive work, man had found free access to the Heavenly Father?

Evening came and with it calm after the tempest. We had vainly tried to persuade the stricken mother to return to the city, but like Rizpah, of our Sacred Writings, she seemed bent on remaining there to watch by her beloved dead. She was adamant. It was only when further orders came to the centurion to hasten the end of the three victims that she quitted, even for a short time, the foot of the cross. And only the kindly but firm commands of the soldiers could have prevailed on her then.

The next day being the Sabbath, the rulers had obtained the necessary authority from Pilate to

have the bodies removed. These sticklers for the law could be particular in their observance of it when it suited them! Therefore, the centurion was commanded to break the legs of the victims, and so complete their sufferings. This was done to both malefactors. Jesus, however, was already dead. He was not treated in that fashion, for indeed our Scriptures had said, "A bone of Him shall not be broken." But one of the soldiers, more zealous than was necessary, plunged his spear into the Master's side, and therefrom flowed both blood and water.

Mary had again taken her station by the cross. John and I were just discussing how we could persuade her to return home to her dwelling, when our attention was drawn to some strangers, making their way up the hillside. They were two members of the Sanhedrin, accompanied by three or four servants. I was filled with dismay. Did this presage some further indignity to be put on Him we loved? John reassured me. He knew one of the men; it was Nicodemus. The other was his friend, Joseph of Arimathaea. And they had come to Calvary's cross for what? I could hardly believe my ears. Their object was to do honour to One whom in secret they had revered. A glance at the authority they bore, to which was affixed the seal of Pilate, was sufficient for the centurion, and he gave orders to his men. I had

thought those soldiers callous indeed as I had watched them earlier in the day. But the generous aid they now lent in taking the precious body down from the cross showed that they were not devoid of feeling. And while this was being done, I learned from Joseph what had transpired.

Although he and Nicodemus were members of the Sanhedrin, they had been kept in ignorance of the atrocious steps finally taken under the direction of Annas. The reason was plain. Both were disciples of Jesus, although, as Joseph confessed with down-turned eyes, they had feared their colleagues' anger too much to admit their allegiance to the Teacher of Galilee. Shamed by the turn of events, they ultimately agreed to ally themselves with Him, even though their loyalty came too late to save Him. Joseph was a man of substance. His estate lay nigh to Golgotha, and there he had hewn a tomb in which his own remains were one day to rest. Now he proposed to give it for the burial of our Lord. Making mention of this to his friend Nicodemus, he was delighted to find that this other secret disciple desired to share in the project by providing the spices. So together they had gone to Pilate. Joseph knew that he had no lawful claim to the body, but he boldly made his request. The Procurator was in the throes of remorse, and not disposed to grant any such favour.

“Get ye gone! I am sick unto death of these ceaseless importunities. First ye rulers come clamouring for the crucifixion of an innocent Man, and then, as though I were not already surfeited with the case, there come those who require His death to be hastened and ask an additional guard lest He should rise again from the dead. Now ye require His body for burial. Why must I longer be pestered with this affair?”

Joseph pleaded that he should be permitted to render this humane service, urging that, once the remains were interred, the Procurator would be troubled no more. Pilate, more to rid himself of the suppliants than for any other reason, at last yielded, and gave the necessary order. And thus they had come, their servants bearing a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the requisite linen cloths.

Sadly we bore the sacred form, so marred by human hate, down the slopes of Calvary. Joseph and Nicodemus, John and I, carried Him to that rock-hewn tomb, the women and servants following. The hour was growing late. We hastily wrapped the body about with the linen cloths and the spices, and then rolled the stone across the opening. Our work was barely finished when the Roman soldiers, forming the special guard which the priests had secured, appeared to take up their vigil. And as Joseph's offer to inter the body of

Jesus had been communicated to the officer, he knew the exact location of the tomb. We stood by while they affixed the official seal to the stone. Then with breaking hearts, we left Christ in their keeping.

VIII

SATURDAY—A DAY OF MEMORIES

*“ ‘So the Nazarene is dead,’
Caiaphas the High Priest said.
‘His wonder-working deeds are o’er,
He will trouble us no more.
May blasphemers such as He
Perish on the shameful tree,
And our holy Temple law
Be kept free from ev’ry flaw;
For the Temple must have sway
Till heaven and earth shall pass away.
So the Nazarene is dead,’
Caiaphas the High Priest said.*

*“The Temple now has passed away,
Ended Rome’s imperial day,
But the Nazarene still lives.
Peace to myriad souls He gives,
Lives in gentle words and deeds,
In all that meets the spirit’s needs,
And the Cross on which He died
By His death is sanctified;
Hosts in many lands acclaim
The Crucified One by His Name;
In their faithful hearts is seen
The ever-living Nazarene.
Priest and Pilate both have said
That the Nazarene is dead.
False their wisdom—false their lore—
He lives now and evermore.”*

W. E. A. AXON.

THE SATURDAY OF THAT WEEK

A DAY OF MEMORIES

IT were doubtless presumptuous on my part to say that I felt the tragedy of Christ's death more than any of my fellow-disciples. Yet, verily I believe it was so. The half-healed wound of my previous sorrow gushed open again. The loss of my wife came back with crushing weight. Perhaps you will understand. While I companied with Christ, I had been comforted and almost reconciled to my bereaved state. Was He not, as I fondly imagined, the Lord of life and death? And did He not seem to possess sovereign rights over those powers which held human life in thrall? But now I had seen the dread spectre lay its bony hand upon Him, and He was helpless in its grip. I had seen that fair life, the embodiment of all that was pure and noble, crushed by its might. Death and the grave had proved victorious! With dying breath, He had cried, "It is finished!" Verily, it was. In that tomb lay buried not only my beloved Master, but every hope of re-union with her I adored, every hope with which He had illumined my darkened soul, every hope of the Kingdom's supremacy and His

own beneficent rule. And I, of all men, was most bereft and desolate.

By some inexplicable providence, the scattered disciples of our Lord gravitated to that hallowed place, the Upper Room. Nay, perhaps it was not entirely without explanation. Fear had gripped our hearts. We dreaded the priests, whose taste for blood was now whetted, and who might seek to slay the intimates of Jesus and so complete the brutal purpose which had so far succeeded. We dared not leave the city, lest we should be arrested as we tried to escape. Yet there were foes on every hand and not a hospitable door open to us, except one. The good man of the house where we had met in secret would possibly give us shelter. And the fact that our meeting-place was unknown to any outside our circle, seemed to give assurance of safety.

There I found several of my associates; later, the others joined us, one by one. We had no plans, no hopes. Blank despair sat enthroned in our hearts. John had safely installed the sorrowful mother temporarily with the other women, and he now sat with his head in his hands, tears trickling through his fingers. In vain did his brother, James, lay a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder, for no words of comfort could assuage such grief even could words be found. Simon Peter paced the room incessantly. With an im-

pulsive gesture, he would fling his arms into the air at intervals, and then beat his clenched fists upon his breast. In spite of our common sorrow, our hearts went out to him. Tortured as we all were with the remembrance of our lamentable cowardice, his was also the remorse of one who had vowed splendidly and fallen shamefully. And we could hear him repeatedly crying under his breath, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Never was there a day so long. I felt like a soul in torment. With my companions about me, there seemed no escape from the accusing spectres of the mind. As soon as night fell, therefore, I fared forth for I could endure that room no longer. Stealthily, like a hunted creature, I crept along in the shadows, tracing without knowing it the very way in which we had walked for the last time with our Master. Only two nights ago? It seemed an eternity! I sat down by the brook Kidron. Gloomy and forbidding, Gethsemane lay a short distance on the other side. I could never go there again; the memories were too poignant. But soothed by the rustling leaves and the lapping of the water against the stones, my mind grew calmer, and I began to live over again the days we had spent with that incomparable Master.

There is some comfort, now and then, in remembering that human nature is much the same

in every age, and so difficulty and consequent discouragement are not the monopoly of any generation. Of course, it were idle to conceal the fact that we of the Eleven were disheartened as well as depressed. The period of peace and blessing we had enjoyed had come to an end. Christ's triumph could never be consummated. Faith had been tried to the breaking-point, and hope had fled. Naturally, therefore, we could not face the requirements of a new day in the right spirit. We lacked both the optimism and the unquenchable ardour which are essential to success, and with which discipleship ought to be synonymous. And yet, as I pondered the past, placing the Master against the prophets who had preceded Him and the representatives of religion as I knew them, His superiority emerged at every point of comparison. The faith I had learned at His feet emphasised the regal state of the Redeemer—a state voluntarily discarded—and with a firm declaration of His ultimate triumph over the forces of the world, it sought to fire the soul with heroic faith. So it was like a light sweeping the sullen waters, and guiding the mariner to his haven. It was like a breath of the ocean to the jaded city-dweller, bringing the flush of health to the cheek and the song to the soul. It was like the sun, piercing the clouds with his lances of light, and unfurling a standard round which the scattered

forces might rally. The aspect of things was changed. Men who had wondered if faith were worth while, sickened by the hypocrisy about them, saw Christ's wondrous life of sympathy and their souls found hope. It is true that to some Jesus of Nazareth was of minor interest. Sad though it be to admit the fact, it were sadder to ignore it. There were others, however, of somewhat nobler temper, to whom He was one of the fairest figures of the race, although, when they looked on His unblemished life, it was as though they saw no beauty that they should desire Him. That is not as surprising as it appears at first sight. Were the stars to shine only once in a lifetime, the community would stay up all night to gaze in wonder on the vast scroll of the heavens, like an illuminated manuscript, but as they can be seen almost any night, scarcely any one notices them! Familiarity filches life's noblest things from us. Yet when men looked reverently on that life of lives, they saw something of the eternal glory of the Godhead. Against a repellent background of pettiness and suspicion, His fair soul was seen in all its perfection, as the seller of goodly pearls will sometimes place his choicest treasures against the dark folds of his garment, that their lustre may be the better appraised. Though He started without the prestige of the schools, His words of wisdom

compelled attention. Though He was denied the imprimatur of official religion, He taught with authority. Though confronted with the rooted prejudice that no good thing could come out of Nazareth, His ministry of power and compassion for the suffering and the derelict awakened admiration and respect in the hearts of many. Criticism left Him unsoured; success left Him unspoiled. When the tide of prosperity ran high, He was just as thoughtful for others, just as approachable, as when He was unknown. And when failure menaced His mission, when His adherents grew lukewarm and even we who were His chosen friends became less dependable, He remained patient and uncomplaining as before. The sheer heroism of His manhood, the loftiness of His ideals, and the altitude of His personal character, marked Him out as the Man amongst men.

As I lived again through those magic days, my mind centred on the questions which were stirred by Christ's remarkable ministry. They resolved themselves largely into this: "Is not this Joseph's Son?" Yet in ever-widening circles they spread until the clash of contending opinions was heard. The more men pondered that life, the more they were puzzled as they tried to explain it in terms of merely human origin. He was the most prolific subject on which the brilliance of intellect

has ever fastened. Yet while the ablest mind was baffled to compass Him altogether, the simplest soul knew enough of His love and grace to lift Him high above the plane of the simply human. In Him are depths that have not been sounded; there are altitudes of moral excellence that have never been trodden by other feet. He remains unsurpassed and unsurpassable! Nor is that all. In the Peasant-Preacher of Galilee the world had a real Reformer. Our Lord was in the van of true advancement and reform. There is not a single problem exercising the mind of man for which not only has He a solution, but the solution. He alone gave to men reasonable views of God, definite direction for man's life and for his intercourse with his fellows, and an undeniably stable foundation both for personal character and for society. As any thoughtful and unbiased student of Christ's words would admit, if we would apply His teachings to social conditions, we would have a world that would soon be almost unrecognisable. The wrongs under which multitudes groan would be removed. The petty tyrannies and villainies that leave the soul with a stinging sense of injustice would go. Strife would be impossible, and instead of the misunderstandings and quibbles, resulting in continued estrangement, there would be a realisation of Christ's aim for humanity. It might be a revolution thus to apply

the Sermon on the Mount to everyday conditions; it would be a revolution that would make for peace as well as reform. It would veritably mean deliverance for the captive and an era of happiness and prosperity such as the world has not yet seen. That, at least, I felt in the quiet of that evening hour.

To see Jesus aright would mean all this and more. Yet only the pure in heart can see God, and only the reverent in spirit can truly behold the glorious purpose of the divine Son. That is only another way of saying that only by admitting His right to rule, can the long-desired blessing be enjoyed.

It is tragic when, lacking due reverence, men fail to see what Christ is, and what the world owes to Him. Their cynicism is an indication of shallowness. The careless crowd might talk as though, dying a felon's death, Jesus were discredited for all time, but perchance in God's good time it will be found that He is at the base of our noblest achievements. The ruling classes hated Him. It was appalling to see to what lengths men go when once their anger was aroused. Craftiness stopped at nothing; prejudice stooped to anything. Those who posed as the religious leaders, the intellectual luminaries of the nation, laid skilful traps of various kinds that He might be taken. Time after time their own feet were

enmeshed by the nets they had prepared, but that did not deter them from further effort. Though never man spake as this Man, though none had ever before shown such generosity of judgment or such a measure of mercy to the sinful outcast, it made no difference. Though rich and poor had received of His bounty, although none sought His succour in vain, what did they care? The healing of His wondrous hand was seen in the mansion of wealth and the cottage of lowly poverty. Yet in His own need there was none to whom He could turn.

It is eloquent witness to the blamelessness of His life that only when one of His own disciples turned traitor could they lay hold of Him. And only on a trumped-up charge and by a packed court could they secure a verdict against Him. Yet at last He was condemned, and because of it He was crowned, although in derision and with diabolical ingenuity, with a circlet of thorns. He was led out to Calvary that the mob might be satisfied with the sight of human suffering and their lust for blood sated. And in the midst of that maddened, yelling throng there were some whom I readily recognised, and whom one might well have challenged. "You, strong of arm and swarthy of face, hurling your vile epithets at this gentle Master of Galilee? But you were glad enough once, when led by another crowd that

hung on His preaching, to be fed by bread of His providing." "You, woman of the home, whose little child once nestled on that bosom and was embraced by those now fast-nailed hands? You were glad indeed to see those lips laid on the brow of your first-born; and yet you have so far forgotten your womanly pity and the reverence He paid to womanhood, to be found among this hate-filled horde?" "You, poor hirelings, whose cause Jesus took up against your exacting masters, have you nothing to render Him but your vile jeers and mockery?" "And you, with the marks of past suffering upon your face, He gave you deliverance when you were fast-gripped by disease. Can you look on that Face, still radiant with love, and instead of loyal protest add your taunt to the rest?" Truly, as I seemed to stand again by the Christ, designated by Pilate the King of the Jews, I beheld not only the cruel irony of it, but also something kingly and majestic about that suffering Saviour of the world. Why was this permitted? Just God! is there no pity in the heavens nor on the earth? What evil hath He done? Yet while my heart was stirred to question thus, there was born in me a deep sense of my own guilt. There is that indifference which consents. It is as contemptible as the hate that actively participates in the deed. There were many around the cross who looked on without

pity, though they knew this to be a gross miscarriage of justice. They had heard Jesus speak words of superb appeal, yet they never paused to consider His claims. They knew mischief was afoot, knew that one of the blackest conspiracies in the history of mankind was being hatched. They might have given their strength to secure justice had they cared. They saw Him crowned with thorns; they spelled out the inscription above His head. Yet to one another I imagined them saying, "Business is business. Were we to take His part, who would take ours? He would die in any case, and we must live! And if we incur the displeasure of the rulers, how can we keep our trade? Besides, though He appeared to be a good man, the Sanhedrin must know what it is doing. After all, it is their affair, not ours."

They were not men enough to acknowledge the fact that possibly they owed everything to Him. There in the city Christ found some of them, like the traveller in His own parable, stripped of purity, honour, and self-respect. But He gave them their chance. He enabled them to start life anew, though, lest they might be thought over-righteous by their friends, they said nothing of it. There were others who did not side with Him, not because they lacked courage, but because they were engrossed with their own affairs. Was it their concern that the world had cast Him out?

Were they responsible for the ills He might have removed? If the weak were oppressed by the strong, if they were herded together in ways which were an abomination to the Lord, was not that the business of the State or of the city? If vice reigned, flaunting its painted face unchallenged, if morality were at a discount, in the shameful dens in which some were compelled to live, how could they help it?

My own experience proved that it is comparatively easy to evade responsibility in this way. It is possible to assume an air of injured surprise when such wrongs are mentioned, or a look of aggrieved innocence when the charge is made that one who knowingly consents to the committal of a crime is in part involved in it. It may be that such men feel harshly dealt with when the public conscience condemns them if they permit an injustice to be perpetuated or some evil thing to be done without protest. It is the duty of every true soul to attempt to vindicate the right, and resist the wrongdoer. Neither the Sanhedrin in the one case nor the State in the other could be saddled with the entire blame for the rejection of Christ. My conviction deepened that it was not indeed strange that the great Teacher had been crowned with thorns. It would have been remarkable had He not been set upon by the disgraceful hypocrisy which He had stripped naked. He lived a life

which was a constant rebuke to those who beheld it. Yet that was not His prime purpose. He came to make it plain to the world that man could live as God desires. Christ showed that He Himself is the way, the truth, and the life, and though He was crowned with the diadem of suffering, He was also offering a sacrifice for sin in which all the families of the earth might find pardon, blessedness, and peace. The callous priests and Pharisees did their part, and did it with all the relentless thoroughness one might expect. Yet the good could not be held in check by their rejection of our Redeemer. Lifted high upon the cross, Christ was held forth as God's message of love to an erring race. Suffering thus, He tasted death for every man, with those pierced hands throwing open the doors of new life to the penitent. His sacrificial work was completed. None other could do what He did, for only the God-Man could present a perfect sacrifice. Only the divine could rightly reveal the heart of God towards His children, and only the human-divine could show man what he was and what he ought to be. Thus to the bitter death of the cross Christ went, keeping nothing back. Love must give its best; it must do its utmost. Not only in that one terrible tragedy, but also through the years of His earthly life, the whole purpose of Christ was man's redemption. When I call to mind His

infinite love and immeasurable patience with those who so often failed to penetrate His meaning, I am amazed. His sympathy and compassion for the sorrowing and the sinful were but the outflow of His own gracious soul. But there in His atoning sacrifice was the crowning blessing He came to bestow. Although some might remain shrouded in unbelief, although some spake His name with execration, could that hold back the ultimate fulfilment of God's mighty purpose for man?

Thus I lived again in the past and the present. But not for the first time, although it was now with new intensity, did I realise that there were two separate sides to my nature. One saw in Jesus the world's great Redeemer, offering a sacrifice as unique as it was all-sufficient. The other saw Him, as did His adversaries—discredited, crucified, silenced for ever. One was the disciple who had been lifted from the mire of despond into delightful fellowship, his soul aglow with desire to obey the dictates of One pre-eminently great in character and life. The other was a man who had been flung down from the high plateau of privilege to find himself alone on a bleak hillside, where swirling mists enwrapped him, and not a star shone to give him hope. And to that latter self my soul was subdued. My discipleship was all a mistake. Christ had believed Himself the

Son of God. He had staked everything upon the divine mission to which He felt called. But when He had ventured to put His faith in God to the test, God had not vindicated His claims. That kingdom of which He spake, like a fair and alluring mirage, such as I have seen more than once in my travels, was just as unsubstantial, and in a moment it had vanished from sight. I had believed Him with all my heart. I trusted that even as He had discomfited those who sought to question His authority, He would also have vanquished His adversaries at the eleventh hour. If He were truly what He said and what we thought, would not God have intervened? Would the Divine Father have allowed His Son to be taken from the world that needed Him so sorely? Nay, surely, even as Pilate uttered sentence, or as the executioners stretched Him upon that cross of torture, the heavenly legions would have appeared for His succour. And they did not! Oh, it was terrible thus to have loved and lost! Henceforth, there was but one thing to do. One must go back to the common task, stricken in soul and haunted by memories of a dream that could never be fulfilled. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried, and I, Thomas the Doubter, lived disillusioned and desolate. But, at least, credit me with this: it was because Christ had meant so much that I doubted so deeply.

IX
EPILOGUE

*"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.*

*Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'*

*"Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.'"*

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

EPILOGUE

WITH many digressions, I have sought to recount the tragic events of that fateful week, and now, as I come to set down the glorious fact of Christ's resurrection, my own shame must be the more apparent, and my baseness felt by all. The long hours of the Sabbath had come to an end. Never had a day seemed so reluctant to draw to its close. We had lain down to rest, though few of us to sleep. For myself, I would have given all I had to have slept never to open mine eyes again on a world so unfeeling and so enshrouded with mystery. The thoughts which had been running through my mind during the day were still with me as I lay watching the shadows flung on the wall by the tiny lamp. Yet, in spite of everything, I must have dozed. Suddenly, I bestirred myself for a hand beat frenziedly on the outer door. We were alert in a moment. The grey dawn filled the room, and I look at the startled faces of my companions.

"It is the Master's enemies," whispered Peter, springing to his feet, and looking about vainly for a weapon. "We will die before they shall take us. Look if there be any guarding yonder

window, Philip. Perchance we may make good our escape."

While Philip obeyed his bidding, I said, "Let us also lay down our lives for His sake. Can the days be longer borne without His presence?"

He turned on me savagely. "Coward! Did He not bid us endure to the end if we would be saved? For me, it shall be fight or flight that I may later find means of proving my repentance, and render that obedience He richly deserves."

The knocking still continued. A hand tried the latch.

"That is rather the summons of a friend than a foe," ventured John.

At that word, James of Zebedee strode to the door to open it. He was pushed roughly away by Peter who had determined on a line of action.

"Friend or foe, we shall see. There is none waiting in the street below? Good! Then let every man follow me. Should it be those of the High Priest, in the confusion as we rush forth, we may break through. Then all make for the gate leading to the Kidron."

With a swift movement, Peter raised the bar and flung the door suddenly open. Salome and two other women almost fell into the room. Their hair was dishevelled, and their breath came in gasps. Yet their faces were strangely radiant.

"Why, what meaneth this?" cried Peter, with

undue harshness. "How knew ye where we lay? Have the Elders also learned of this place?"

"Nay," replied Salome, fixing her eyes on her two sons. "John told me where he might be found lest the Mother should need him. But it is not for naught we have come hither. . . . Christ . . . the Master . . . is risen from the dead!"

"What! Risen? Our Lord come back from the grave?"

The disciples pressed their questions upon her, astonished almost beyond belief. But Peter had already laid hold of John, and together with eager feet they sped to the tomb.

James, having quietly replaced the bar across the door, bade his mother tell us quickly what it all meant. A silence fell on the company as she said again, "The Lord is risen! The sepulchre is empty."

"Crazed with grief, and long watching," quoth I. "This is but an idle tale."

James glared angrily in my direction, but I could plainly see that some of the others were of the same mind as myself.

"Come, mother," he urged. "Mind not Thomas, but tell us fully what thy words portend."

She then related how Mary Magdalene and she, together with their companions, had gone

to the sepulchre at daybreak, intent on completing the work of embalming the sacred body. On the way, they had debated how, unaided, they could roll away the stone; yea, whether the sentinels would even allow them to break the seal, and render the last offices to the dead. But as they drew nigh, the ground had trembled beneath their feet. A light supernal shone about the tomb. At first, their eyes were blinded by its brilliance. Then eventually, they perceived that the sepulchre was open; the stone had been rolled back in its groove, and enthroned upon it sat an angelic figure, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose raiment white as driven snow.

"We stood entranced," continued Salome. "Then the angel spake. 'Fear not ye,' he said, 'for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.'"

As Salome finished, we sat looking at her, pondering her words, and vainly seeking to devise some way of calming her excitement. I was fully persuaded that these women were deluded. And, verily, after all they had witnessed and suffered that day on Calvary it were not surprising. I said as much to James, and I noted with some satisfaction that he was now more inclined to accept

my explanation of the facts. At that moment, however, Peter and John returned. They were both spent with running, but one could not fail to see the strange look of exultation overspreading their faces. And an amazing story they also had to tell.

It appeared that John, being much the younger, had outstripped the other, and on reaching the sepulchre, he found that not only was the stone removed, but also that the tomb itself was empty. Staggered for a moment by his discovery, he had stood outside, filled with vague fears. Peter had, however, gone boldly in; John then followed his example. The body had gone, but they saw that the linen wrappings, and also the cloth which had been about His head, were lying on the floor.

"It is the Jews again," said I. "It is evident that they have stolen the Master's body, perchance to heap some further indignity upon it."

"But what of the guard, set there by command of Pilate to prevent the tomb from being rifled?" demanded Peter hotly.

"The elders feared that He might rise again," asserted John. "It were unreasonable to suppose that they would remove the remains, and thus frustrate their own ends."

Nathanael, who seldom spoke before the company without grave cause, intervened. "Did not

our Lord prophesy that He would rise again the third day? It is even as He told us!"

It was useless! I could not refute their arguments, neither could I longer bear the joyous air of certainty which filled the room as they spake of this stupendous event. Desperate, careless of whom I might meet, I strode out into the morning light. To remain even within sound of their voices was more than I could stand. But judge me not too harshly. Deeply did I love my Lord, and to lose Him was, as I have already said, the crowning sorrow of my troubled life. Therefore, I could not look on those friends of mine, buoyed up as they were with hopes that I well knew must be pricked like bladders of air, allowing them to sink still deeper in the chill waters of despair.

All through that day, I ranged the hills around Jerusalem like a haunted man. There was a time, long ago, when I wooed fair Miriam nigh her northern home, when my soul leapt up in exalted pleasure to meet the sights and sounds of Nature. The mountains used to appear to me like the temple of Jehovah. Every rock was an altar on which some sacrifice might well have been offered to Him; every pool and lakelet, a laver at which His priests might be purified; every tree a robed attendant, standing mutely by, while the birds sang the songs of the choristers. Now, crushed and disillusioned by the loss which not we only,

but also the whole race had sustained, how could I find anything in which the heart could take delight? Nay, the very beauty of the earth tended to throw into more violent contrast the brutality and wickedness of man. Why had I ever forsaken my daily craft to follow the Nazarene? Had one not loved so well, the sorrow were not so keen! And yet, suppose there were some basis of fact for what the women had said, and my fellow-disciples believed? Suppose it were indeed true that our Master were the Son of God, and that, sealed and guarded though the tomb had been, He had risen from the dead, would not that change the whole aspect of things?

Like a drowning man grasping at a floating spar, I found myself eagerly seizing the hope I had flouted in others. But then, so weighted by griefs, past and present, was I, that it sank with me even as I laid hold of it. Such thoughts were futile! Jesus was dead! Surely I could believe the witness of mine own eyes. There on the cross He had drawn His final breath. That spear-thrust had, as it were, broken the very lamp in which the last spark had been extinguished. I had myself helped to carry the mutilated form to its resting-place, and to roll the stone across the entrance to the sepulchre. Yet my companions dreamt that He still lived! Alas; I knew only too well that it was impossible.

How long I battled against the unreasonable, I cannot tell. But at last, jaded in mind and body, and faint for lack of food, I remember turning back towards our place of concealment. The city seemed leagues away, as it lay fair and peaceful in the roseate light of the setting sun. None could believe that it harboured the vilest fiends in human shape, who, in the guise of holiness, were even then, perchance, gloating over the success which had crowned their plans. They had done an innocent Man to death! And I felt it would pollute my very soul to walk those streets again. I skirted the walls until I gained the gate nearest to where we dwelt. Thus the hour was late when, weariedly, I mounted the outer stairway, and knocked upon the door.

It was opened instantly, and I was greeted with a rapturous outburst from those within. "The Lord is risen indeed," they cried with one voice.

"Yea, truly?" I asked, flinging myself exhausted upon a divan, and at the same time inwardly cursing my stupidity in coming back. "Such were the tidings with which the day began. What further need is there again to discuss that?"

They bore my querulousness with greater patience than I deserved. "Mary Magdalene—she out of whom the Lord cast seven devils—hath seen and talked with Him in the Garden. She

supposed Him, at first, to be one of Joseph's men, but even as she was saying, 'Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him,' she heard the beloved voice say, 'Mary,' and raising her eyes, immediately she recognised the Risen Saviour."

"A woman's tale," I remarked bitterly.

"Wait, Thomas!" Peter swung round towards me, and there was a note of severity in his tones. "Thine unbelief hath gone far enough. Dost thou take us for fools? Listen! Many are my sins, and God forbid that I should judge thee, but what we say unto thee is sober truth, as Heaven is my witness. We also have seen the Lord! In this evening hour, while the door was shut as thou didst find it, the Master came and stood in the midst of us. We looked at Him as men that dream. 'Peace be unto you,' He said, looking around at us seated here. Then perceiving that we were incredulous even as thou art, He showed us His hands and His side. No further proof was needed. It was indeed Him whom we love. Our hearts were flooded with gladness as are the vales of Judaea by the morning light when the sun ariseth in his strength. 'Peace be unto you,' He saith again. 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. . . . Receive the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they

are retained.' Now, Thomas, what sayest thou?"

My heart was in revolt against my head. I could tolerate this no longer. Springing wildly to my feet, I exclaimed, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

They had goaded me almost to madness, and I fear I scarce knew what I was saying. Undecided as to what I should do, I stood confronting them, when at that instant, we were surprised by the coming of Cleopas, and another of the Master's adherents. How they had ascertained where we were to be found, I do not know. But they brought the astonishing news that, while on the way to a distant village, called Emmaus, and talking over the momentous story the women had told that morning, a stranger accosted them on the road.

"What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" he asked.

They were at first inclined to be cautious, but his evident sympathy for those in trouble caused them to speak freely of what lay upon their hearts. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?"

"What things?" he enquired, leaving their

question unanswered although they did not notice at the time.

“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.”

The stranger followed Cleopas's words with closest attention.

“Beside all this,” our friend had continued, “to-day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre. And when they found not His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels which said He was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said; but Him they saw not.”

Peter intervened with a question we were all wishing to ask. “Tell us, who was this stranger?”

“That I am hastening to do,” replied the other. “He then said to us, ‘O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?’”

"With that, greatly marvelling at this question, we listened while he began to expound to us the Scriptures. From Moses right through one prophet after another he spake of the things they had taught concerning the Christ."

"And what happened then?" John asked.

"We had reached Emmaus," continued Cleopas, "and although our unknown companion seemed intent on going farther, we prevailed on him to tarry. It was well toward evening, and had he proceeded on his way, he would have been sorely put to it, as we judged, to find shelter for the night. A meal was soon provided for us at the inn. He gladly yielded to our desire that he should partake of it with us. Then a wondrous thing moved us with surprise. Although he was our guest, he himself took the bread, and blessed it and brake, and then gave to us. Immediately our eyes seemed illumined of God. We knew Him—it was the Lord Christ! Then He vanished out of sight. We looked at the vacant seat, thinking for a moment that it were all a dream, when my companion here said, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?'

"My friend was right. That Stranger on the road was the Risen Lord! And instantly, unmindful of our weariness, we came hither to bring

to you who are accounted His chosen disciples these tidings of great joy."

As Cleopas ended his story, I felt that all eyes were turned upon me.

"What sayest thou to this, Thomas?" Peter, who seemed bent on convincing me of my error, gripped my arm.

"That which I have said already," I answered shortly. "Except I see I will not believe!"

Others of our fellowship have related better than I could the story of Christ's appearances to His disciples at various times, and especially His solemn meeting with Simon Peter on the shores of Lake Galilee. I am mainly concerned with that in which I was personally involved, whereby my gloom-laden soul was led out of darkness into light, and all my doubts dispelled. It was the eighth day after His resurrection. We of the Eleven were still without definite plans. The good man of the house, out of the largeness of his heart, had prevailed on us to abide beneath his roof as long as we chose. Truth to tell, even had we been sure that our enemies had decided not to molest us, we would have been loth to leave that spot. The door was shut as before when, standing in the midst again, we beheld Jesus. My soul leapt up at the sight. I could have shouted for very joy. There in that room where He had

washed our feet, where He had sat with us for the Paschal Meal, and where those sublime words of comfort and counsel fell from His lips, was the Master I adored.

"Peace be unto you," He said in the well-remembered tones, lifting His hand in salutation to us all. A hush had fallen upon the company; not a man stirred.

"Thomas!" The blood surged to my face, and my heart smote within my breast like the hammer of the smith upon the anvil. I could not answer Him; I could but look mutely into His luminous eyes.

"Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing."

In a flash I saw the irrationality of my conditions. Christ was prepared to submit to the tests I had stipulated as essential to faith, and yet true faith needed no such basis. Flinging myself in abject penitence and passionate love before Him, I could but cry with choking voice, "My Lord and my God!"

He had laid His hand in gracious forgiveness upon my bowed head. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Yea, it is even as the Master hath said. Yet

I have tried to tell the story of my shameful unbelief in the hope that some who, like myself, have known life's sorrows and the eclipse of faith, may come to a genuine realisation of Christ's glorious resurrection, and through it be made strong. Life was transfigured for me. As truly as I saw Jesus dead, as truly did I see Him alive. No longer the victim, as I had feared, He was the Victor. He had triumphed; death had no power over Him. He had wrought eternal redemption for us and for all men: sin's fell consequences were removed and the estranged were reconciled to God. And that cross on which I saw Him lifted up was more sublime than a kingly throne, that crown of thorns a more regal symbol than the diadem of earth's mightiest monarchs. They live that men may die; He died that men might live. To those who in penitence turn in believing love to Him, He shall stand revealed as the Christ of God. And with those nail-scarred hands, He shall throw open the gates of life indeed both in this world and in that which is to come. Yea, those same hands shall break the rod of the oppressor, and shall burst the bonds of the sin-enslaved and Christ shall take unto Him His great power and reign.

The story of Thomas, the one-time doubter, but now the convinced, is ended!

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We have but little more to add. Only when Christ is given His rightful place as Sovereign in the soul can there be rest and true blessedness. Only when the Senates of the nations have acknowledged His rule, only when the individual Christian sets out to make Christ Sovereign of the personal life and then of the whole wide world, can the fruits of His salvation be gathered.

The Church of God exists for this very purpose, for it is composed of women and men who have themselves given public acknowledgment of the crown rights of the Redeemer. They are meant to spread the knowledge of His love and of the will Divine to the distant places of the earth; they are likewise intended to bring Christ's ideals before men, and apply His principles to the work of redeeming society. Alas, sometimes we have been too much engrossed with our own petty affairs, and have spent time and strength in carping at one another when we ought to have been assailing the triple alliance of the world, the flesh and the devil, smiting it hip and thigh. We have been kept so close to the minor details of organisation and the rest that we have failed to see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. Yet when the Christian has seen this vision, whenever the Church has realised the dignity of her position, what has followed? She has gone forth to heal the soul-sick, and to pour the light of celestial

day upon darkened minds. She has never appeared more noble than when she has attempted what has been rated as a quixotic quest, or when, in the name of the Crucified, she has gone forth to subdue lawlessness and exorcise the spirit of evil from the breasts of mankind. The day of His sovereignty shall yet dawn. Christ shall yet reign. And the reason? The eternal principles of right that underlie His sacrifice and His claims on human loyalty can never be abrogated. Sir Frank Dicksee in "The Two Crowns" has shown us a young king entering his capital amid the plaudits of the populace. Banners flutter in the air. The folk at the windows fling flowers in his path, while he rides proudly on. His crown flashes in the morning light, scintillating with its myriad gems, while his whole bearing is eloquent of kingly dignity and the splendour of temporal supremacy. But even as he canters through the gateway of the city, his eyes catch sight of a figure of Christ, hanging upon the cross. Instinctively he realises that while his power must wane, the sway of this divine Master must increase for His star is ever in the ascendant. The reason is not far to seek. While the kingdoms of the world are founded, in many cases, upon force, Christ's Kingdom is founded on love. He appeals to the individual loyalty of the human heart. It is not only that He has given men the noblest

example, the loftiest ideals for life, but also that He has given Himself for them. He can lay hold of men's powers, and inspiring them with His living presence create that confidence and arouse that enthusiasm that make victory assured.

Macaulay, with superb skill, describes the effect which King Henry of Navarre had upon his men. The thousand spurring horsemen, with lances in rest, press after the snow-white plume of their leader. Then the battle begins. It is like a mill-stream bursting its dam.

"And in they burst, and on they rushed,
While like a guiding star,
Amid the thickest carnage blazed
The helmet of Navarre."

In a finer, worthier way, yet with the same effectiveness, Christ goes before us into life's battle, into the conflict against evil and unbelief. The fact that we can count on His continual aid means much; the fact that He triumphed over the powers of hate and the grave means more. His ultimate victory in the world is as sure as that the sun rises in the east. Instead of the crown of thorns shall be the many diadems of universal sovereignty. Instead of the rejected Man of Nazareth shall be the regnant Redeemer of the race. Nations shall learn war no more. Strife shall be supplanted by mutual understanding and good will. Class bitterness and international

rivalries shall be rendered obsolete by the claims of brotherhood. And the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!

Impossible? That was the word of Thomas, the Doubter. But when faith in his divine Lord was restored, when Christ became once more a living reality to him, then all dubiety regarding His power to achieve was dispelled. A like faith may be ours. Faith in the fact of His risen life, in the efficacy of His redemptive work, and in the ultimate supremacy of His kingdom, will nerve the heart for heroic endeavour, steady the arm, and fire the blood. Each of us may say, in the glowing words of Julia Ward Howe:

"I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling
camps;

They have builded Him an altar in the evening dew and
damps;

I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring
lamps:

His day is marching on.

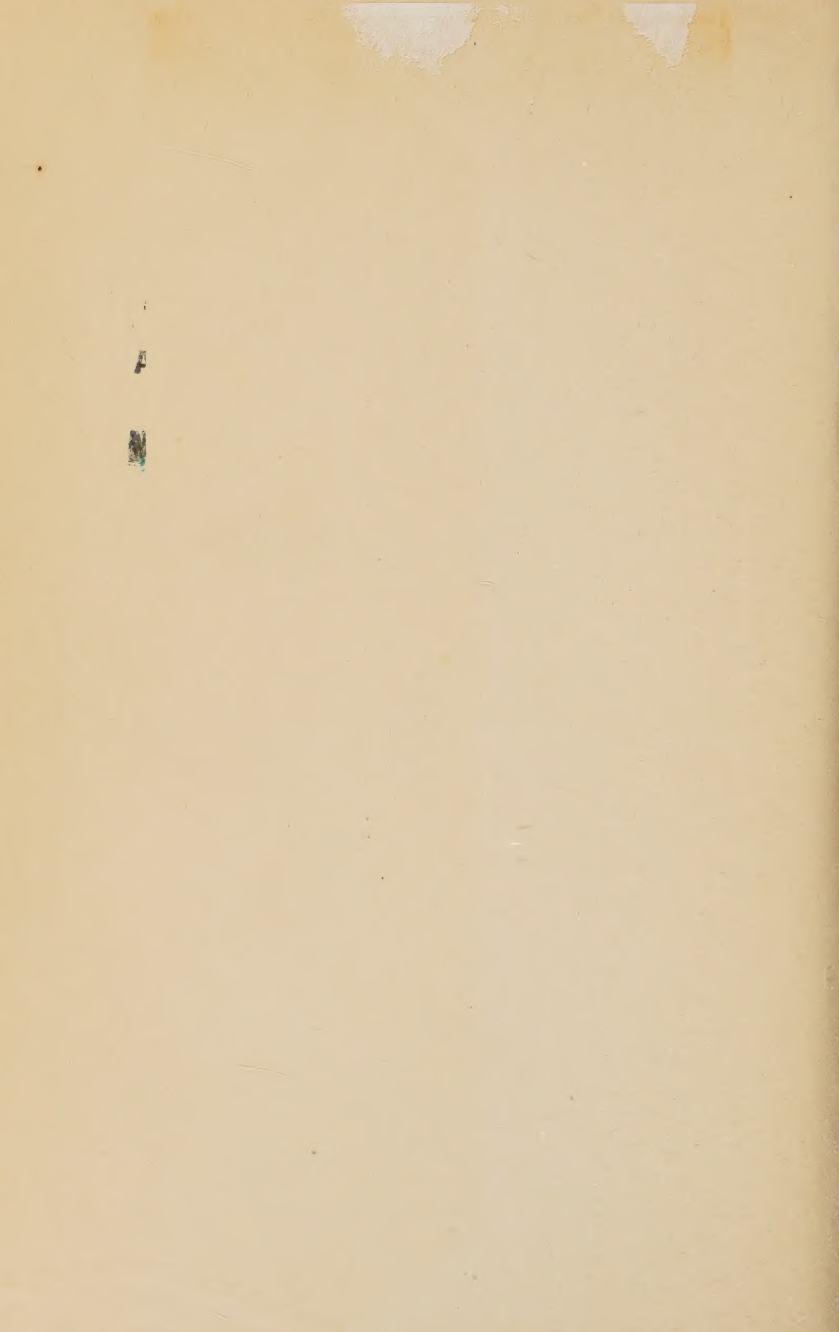
"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call
retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment
seat;

Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my
feet!

Our God is marching on!"

THE END



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